India

Vedic and Post-Vedic

J. Talboys Wheeler

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INDIA: VEDIC AND POST-VEDIC

J. Talboys Wheeler

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CONTENTS

Retrospect of Vedic India	1
The Vedic Period	24
Different Religious Ideas	60
Retrospect of Brahmanic India	107
Concluding Remarks	137
Phases of Civilisation	145

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This book is made up of selections from *The History of India from the Earliest Ages* by J. Talboys Wheeler, at one time Assistant Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, and Secretary of The Indian Record Commission. He is also the author of *The Geography of Herodotus.*

The extracts are drawn from the first three volumes of his work on Indian History which related to the Vedic and Brahmanic periods.

Retrospect of Vedic India

The history of India is of universal interest from the light it throws upon the annals of the human race. It illustrates many phases of civilisation which are present but imperfectly apprehended, but which yet add largely to our knowledge of man. It refers to religions which express almost every aspiration in human nature, from the lowest animal instinct to the most elevated moral sentiment, and from the worship of the vilest images to the conception of One Being, spiritual and supreme.

Four elements in the Hindu era: the Vedic, the Brahmanic, the Buddhist, and the Brahmanical revival

The Hindus of the present generation have been moulded into their existing forms by their past history; and it is by their past history alone that the Europeans can apprehend their modern culture. Moreover, amongst Hindus, and indeed amongst Oriental nations, generally, religion is the only nationality; and the zeal

for religion is the only conception of patriotism. The study of Oriental religions thus assumes a vast political significance; and to be carried out effectually, it necessitates a familiarity with the people themselves, as well as an acquaintance with their sacred writings. From a remote antiquity, four conflicting elements have been at work in forming the national life of the Hindus; and at any moment either of these elements, or a fresh combination of these elements, may be suddenly imbued with a new born enthusiasm, and may overflow the land like a flood of lava. Each has dominated during a particular age; and thus the history of the Hindu era may be divided into four periods, namely, the Vedic, the Brahmanic, the Buddhist, and the Brahmanic revival. But all four elements have been intermingling in the Hindu mind from a very ancient period, and all are more or less intermingling now.[1]

Buddhism, 623-543 B.C., the first chronological standpoint in the history of india

The advent of Buddhism is the first standpoint in the annals of India. It forms, in fact, the only true commencement of Indian history. Its founder, Gautama Buddha, is said to have been born in 623 B.C., and to have died in 543 B.C. at the age of eighty.

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1. The term Hindu era is here employed in its general sense, as comprehending the whole of the ante-Mussulman period, and in a wider sense the whole range of Indian history. The term, however, may be more strictly applied to the history of the people before they were brought under the influence of Brahmanism or Buddhism; and in this latter sense it has been used on the title page.

This chronology is open to future discussions, but it may be accepted as a platform from whence to review the past and commence the history of the future. The life of Gautama Buddha is preceded by a dim vista of unrecorded ages, which is peopled more by creations of the fancy than by mortal men. The heroes and heroines of epic tradition, the gods and goddesses of sacred legend, occupy all the foreground; whilst glimpses of the general masses of the population are but few and far between. But in the sixth century, before the Christian era, Buddhism dawns upon a world of reality and humanity. It represents the ancient people of India, not as mere phantasmagoria, distorted and exaggerated by the imaginations of bards and priests, but as living men and women, occupied with all the cares of existence, yet seeking to work out the main problems of the universe; to discover whether there is not a substantial religion, a form of holiness far beyond the conventional worship of the gods, or the propitiation of unseen powers, which will secure the highest happiness in this life, and in the life to come. The history of the part which Buddhism has been called upon to play, in the great work of religious development in India, is thus replete with lessons for all time; but before attempting to indicate its specialities, it will be necessary to take a retrospective view of the progress of religious thought in this vast peninsula during the dim and remote period which preceded it, and which is generally known as the Vedic and Brahmanic times.

Age preceding Buddhism : distinction between the Vedic and Brahmanic periods

The first important feature of the Hindu era is the broad distinction which originally existed between the Vedic and Brahmanic elements in the early history of the period. It will be seen hereafter that the Vedic Aryans, who colonised the Punjab in a remote antiquity, were worshippers of the spirits or elements of the universe as gods and goddesses, and invoked those deities in the old Sanskrit verses known as Vedic hymns.

At some subsequent period, the Brahmans appeared on the scene and converted the old Vedic deities into representations or manifestations of the supreme spirit, whom they worshipped as Brahma. At the same time, the Brahmans effected other changes in Vedic ideas and usages, which will be found invested with a deep significance. The Vedic Aryans had neither temples, idols, nor rigid caste distinctions. They worshipped their deities as living existences; and they apparently offered their own sacrifices and invocations, and performed their own domestic rites, without the aid of any caste of priests whatsoever. The Brahmans, on the contrary, appear to have encouraged the construction of temples, and to have set up images or idols, which were worshipped individually and collectively as representatives of the one Supreme Being. The Brahmans also seem to have distributed the people into castes; or at any rate to have recognised and sanctioned such caste distinctions; and they arrogated to themselves the position

of an exclusive and hereditary priesthood, through whom alone the people were to present their sacrifices and offer their prayers. These distinctions between the Vedic and Brahmanic religions must be all the more borne in mind because the Brahmans have not only modified the Vedic religion, but have also garbled and interpolated Vedic literature for the purpose of bringing old Vedic traditions and usages into conformity with later Brahmanical ideas. This point will be sufficiently illustrated later; for the present it will suffice to indicate the interval of thought which separates what is purely Vedic from what is purely Brahmanical.

The materials for the history of India, prior to the advent of Buddhism, are to be found in the Vedic hymns and the Hindu epics. The Vedic hymns are valuable as the expression of the religious views of the primitive but intellectual Aryan people, who invaded and occupied north-western India in times primeval, and worshipped the deities or elements of the universe in an age when Brahmanism was unknown.[2] The hymns are singularly free from any Brahmanical element, although later commentators have laboured to interpret them in accordance with Brahmanical teaching. The two voluminous epics, known as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, fall under a totally different category. They are regarded by the whole Hindu

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2. The term Vedic hymns is here specially confined to the hymns or mantras of the *Rig-Veda*, which is the earliest of the four Vedas, and the only one which can be rendered fairly available for history. Compare *History of India* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. II, part V. 'Brahmanic Period', chap. iv.

population of India as the national treasuries of legend and tradition; and, consequently, may be accepted as the modern and popular conceptions of the Hindu people as regards their past history. But they cannot be reduced to the form of chronicles. They refer to different stages in the progress of the people, but there are no links to unite them into a chain of consecutive history. In one sense alone, they seem to have been formed into a harmonious whole. Every incident, whether it originated in the Vedic, Brahmanic, or Buddhist times, has been reproduced in Brahmanic forms by compilers who apparently flourished in the age of the Brahmanical revival. In other words, every legend and tradition has been systematically Brahmanised for the purpose of bringing all the religions, laws, and usages of the different races of India into conformity with Brahmanical ideas. When stripped of these Brahmanical grafts and overgrowth, the legends and traditions will be found to furnish large illustrations of old Hindu civilisation. Again, when considered as a whole, they are valuable in indicating the process by which the varied populations of India have been brought under the Brahmanical influence. But Sanskrit literature, whether Vedic or Brahmanic, has no historical annals in the modern sense of the word. It is devoid of all real sequence or chronology. It is grievously marred by the introduction of monstrous and supernatural fables, which are revolting to European ideas. At best it furnishes little more than isolated pictures of the past, which have been preserved in the ballads of a semi-barbarous age, and converted by later Brahmanical compilers into vehicles for religious teaching.

But although it is impossible to reduce the varied groups of Hindu traditions into a historical form, it is possible to indicate the progress of religious thought from a very remote period. Relics of pre-historic races have preserved the ancient religions intact in remote hills and jungles, as it existed in times primeval, and long before the priestly Brahman appeared on the scene. Again, amongst nations and races which have been brought under the pale of Brahmanical orthodoxy, organic remains of the old faiths are still discernible beneath the crust of Brahmanical teaching. It may thus be possible to trace out the more important elements of religious belief which have been seething in the Hindu intellect from the dawn of history. At the same time, it is possible also to indicate the more important migrations of different races into India, and their ultimate settlement in the regions which they now occupy; and thus to obtain, however hazy and obscure, an approximate idea of the political condition of the people during the unrecorded age which precedes historic times.

Geographical divisions of India : Hindustan, the Dekhan, and the peninsula

Some light may be thrown on the early history of India by a brief glance at its geography. The continent of India is an inverted triangle. Its northern boundary is formed by the mighty range of the Himalayas which walls it off from the remote regions of Turkistan and Chinese Tartary. Its west and eastern sides are respectively washed by the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. It may be divided into three belts or zones, namely—northern and eastern India, the Dekhan in the centre, and the peninsula in

the south. These zones are formed by three lines, running from west to east, namely—the Himalayan wall to the north of India, the line of the Nerbudda river to the north of the Dekhan, and the line of the river Krishna which separates the Dekhan from the peninsula. The lines of these two rivers must be prolonged in each case from sea to sea.

India might thus be described as a triangle, having its northern frontier walled in by the Himalayas, and its western and eastern coasts shut in by the sea. But between the Himalayan wall and the sea, there is, at either end, a considerable interval which has formed a gate or highway into India from time immemorial. The Aryan gate is on the north-west of Delhi, and is formed by the Punjab, including the valley of the Indus and its tributaries. From a remote antiquity, successive waves of Vedic Aryans from Iran or Aryana have passed through this gate for the colonisation of India. The Turanian gate is in the east of India, and is formed by the valley of the river Brahmaputra, which coils round the Himalayas like a huge serpent, and finally falls into the Bay of Bengal. From a period long prior to the Aryan invasions, various unclassed races of supposed Turanian origin, from high Asia, have poured down this valley and found their way through Bengal into upper India.[3]

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3. The terms Aryan and Turanian gates are used only in a general sense, and with considerable reservation. Thus, although the Punjab has been described as the Aryan gate by which the Vedic Aryans entered India, it has also been the highway for Afghan, Turki and Moghul invaders, who certainly cannot be referred to as Aryans in origin. Again, although the Himalayan range has been described as the

Products of India

From time immemorial, India has been famous for the richness and variety of its products. It has especially furnished abundant food for man, except at intervals of drought and famine. For those who live on animal food, there is a great variety of game, as well as sheep, goats, and poultry of every kind. For those who are contented with a simpler diet, there is a superfluity of rice and other grains, and of such condiments as pepper, mustard, and numerous spices. Fruits and vegetables are to be found in luxurious plenty, especially the nutritious plantain, the rich custardapple, the red grape-like lichee, the delicate pineapple, the musk and water-melon, the juicy pomegranate, and above all the delicious mango, which is often larger than the largest pear, and as luscious as an English apricot. Almost every other requirement of humanity is also bountifully provided for. The cotton shrub supplies ample clothing for so warm a climate. The bamboo and coconut trees furnish every material necessary for building a house, for binding it together with cordage, and for matting its sides. The forests contain some of the finest timber. The mines, which are now apparently exhausted, seem to have

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northern wall of India, there is reason to believe that it has often been surmounted by Tibetan races who have found their way over the elevated heights into India. But it is impossible for the historians to trace out the several migrations in ancient times; and it will be sufficient to indicate, with tolerable clearness, those which possess a real historical significance from having left a permanent impression upon the religious development of the people of India. For a valuable collection of original data, see Muir's *Sanskrit Texts*.

been overflowing, in ancient times, with precious stones and metals; whilst the seas that washed the southern coasts, especially those of the island of Ceylon, abounded in oysters which produced the finest pearls.

Different Currents of Immigration

Attractions such as these would naturally draw swarms of adventurers from over-populated or less-favoured climes; and it is easy to conceive that the earliest tides of immigration would have followed the course of the two monsoons. Thus in the remotest past, nondescripts from the unknown south and west of a bygone world may have been driven in rude craft by the south-west monsoon from the southern and Indian oceans towards the western coasts of the peninsula and the Dekhan. Meanwhile, tides of Turanian invasion may have been driven by the chilly blasts of the north-east monsoon, through the eastern Himalayas down the valley of the Brahmaputra. Finally, in a later age, the Aryans on the north-west seem to have entered the Punjab and prepared for the invasion of India. These collisions of rival races were doubtless followed by those intermittent wars for land and subsistence which seem to have characterised the progress of the human race from the earliest age of stone and iron. Invaders from the sea would drive the inhabitants of the coast into the interior. Immigrants from upper Asia would drive the inhabitants of the fertile plains into the hills and jungles. The territories occupied by the several bands of invaders would be constantly exposed to the ravages and outrages of marauders on

the border. Thus the entire Indian continent would be filled with strife and anarchy; and men would secure their harvests, not merely by the ploughshare and the reaping-hook, but by the sword, the spear, and the bow.

Kolarians or Aborigines

The races which occupied India prior to the Vedic Aryans have been excluded from the division of ancient history into the Vedic and Brahmanic times. Indeed, they have no history apart from the Vedic and Brahmanic traditions. The remains of the so-called aboriginal races may be treasured up as memorials of primitive man, but they furnish few data which are available for the purposes of history. For ages their relics have been turning to dust in caves or cromlechs, or lying buried beneath the shapeless mounds which cover the sites of forgotten cities. A few dry bones, a few weapons of stone and rusted metal, a scattering of nameless implements and ornaments are occasionally discovered amongst the debris of ancient settlements and forgotten battle-fields, which for ages have passed into oblivion. But such vestiges of the past can only interest the antiquarian, and throw no light upon the religious or political culture. In the course of ages, many of the primitive races may have been incorporated in the general population, and form, in the present day, the lower strata of the Hindu social system. Others, again, are still undergoing the gradual process of being Hinduised, although they are not as yet recognised as being a part of the Hindu population. Living representatives of primitive races are, however, still ligering in secluded and difficult regions, but they have long ceased to play any important part in the annals of humanity. They

represent the human race in its earliest childhood; and their pleasures and ideas are those of children modified more or less by the intercourse of the sexes. They may open up new fields of labour to the philanthropist and the missionary; they may be received into the Brahmanical pale, or be induced to accept Islam or Christianity; but their intellectual life has ebbed away, perchance never to be restored. In the later annals of India, some of the tribes occasionally rise to the surface, and then drop back into their old obscurity; and it will accordingly suffice to describe them as they individually appear. For the convenience of reference, they are best generalised under the term of Kolarians.[4]

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4. A broad light has been recently thrown upon the pre-Aryan tribes by Dalton's valuable work, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal.* As far back as 1866, Fayrer, an Indian celebrity, proposed a grand scheme for bringing together, in one exhibition at Calcutta, typical examples of the races of the old world. It is much to be regretted that this scheme could not be realised, but so many difficulties were raised that the British Government declined to accept the responsibilities of the exhibition. The fullest information, however, regarding these tribes was collected from the local officers by the British Government, and entrusted to the editorship of Dalton, who had spent the greater portion of his long service in Assam and Chota Nagpur, the most interesting fields of ethnographical research in all Bengal. In 1872, Dalton produced his handsome volume, which is not only a treasury of authentic information, but is illustrated by a series of lithograph portraits of the principal tribes, copied from excellent photographs taken on the spot.

Dalton comprises all the non-Aryan tribes under two heads, namely :

1. The Kolarians, or those who speak a language allied with that of the Kols, Santals, Mundas, and their cognates.

2. The Dravidians, or those who speak a language allied with the Tamil or Telugu. Dalton also treats of an important people, numbering several millions, who are certainly non-Aryans, but who have lost their language and traditions, and have so largely adopted Hindu customs and religion that they can only be called Hinduised aborigines.

Dravidians : Telugu, Tamil, Kanarese and Malayalam

But there is one important race that can neither be referred to as Aryan or Kolarian in origin; that must have occupied a prominent position in the old Indian world which has passed away, and may yet have a high destiny to fulfil in the India which is to be. This is the great Dravidian race of the southern peninsula. The Dravidians apparently entered India long before the Aryans, but it is impossible to say by what route. Their cradle was probably in some distant region in upper Asia. There they seem to have overflowed their ancient limits, and moved in successive waves of immigration into India.[5] Their subsequent history is nearly a blank; but they may perhaps be traced through the Dekhan on their way to the peninsula where they became fused into separate nationalities, each having its own language and institutions, so that it is difficult to say how far they may be referred to as belonging to the same parent stem. In ancient times, they established empires which were once the centres of wealth and civilisation, but which only appear on the pages of history when their political power was drawing to a close. In the present day, they cover an area corresponding to the limits of the Madras presidency. They are represented by the Telugu, the Tamil, the Kanarese, and the Malayalam speaking

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5. The question, as to the origin of the Dravidian people, is still open to discussion. Caldwell, who has spent many years in the south of India, speaks of them as of Turanian affinities who entered India, probably earlier than the Aryans, but across the lower Indus. *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidians of South Indian Family of Languages,* by R. Caldwell.

people of the peninsula. Their political life has stagnated under Brahmanical oppression and Mohammedan rule ; but they are already quickening into new energy under the healthy stimulus of western culture. The Dravidian people are indeed endowed with a latent vitality which stands out in marked contrast to the lassitude of the Bengali; and when they have thrown off the spiritual thraldom of the Brahmans, and subordinated their caste system to the interests of the common weal, they will begin to play an important part in the regeneration of the Indian world.

Dravidian religion

The religion of the Dravidian race has long been crusted over by Brahmanism, but the old faiths are still sufficiently perceptible. The people worship guardian deities of the village and household, and every man has his own patron god. The serpent is respected everywhere and more or less propitiated. The linga too is regarded as a symbol of the power of reproduction, an emblem of the Supreme Being; and it would thus appear that much of the Dravidian religion was originally based upon ideas associated with the sexes. Traces of the linga worship are still lingering throughout the greater part of India, but they are already dying away before the development of spiritual ideas; and but little now remains beyond an archaic symbolism, which has ceased to exercise any unhallowed influence upon the masses.[6]

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6. The religion of the Dravidian people, which lies under the crust of Brahmanism, is interesting from its extreme simplicity. 'Snake worship', says Balfour, 'is general throughout Peninsular India, both of the sculptured form and of the living creature. The sculpture is invariably of the form of the Nag or cobra, and almost every hamlet has its

Vedic Aryans : their origin

The invasion of the Aryans is a still more important standpoint in the history of India. These intellectual people migrated from the cold region of Iran or Arana, and were a cognate race with the ancient Persians. They were, in fact, an offshoot of the same Indo-European stem, which sent forth other branches under the names of Greeks, Italians, Germans, Slaves, and Celts, to conquer the western world. They originally settled in the Punjab, but subsequently crossed the river Saraswati, which separates the Punjab from the rest of India, and began to colonise the upper valleys of the Ganges and the Jamuna. During this advance, they encountered many non-Vedic populations, and especially engaged in alternate wars and alliances with a powerful people known as the Nagas, who were possibly of Dravidian origin. These Nagas were apparently so called from their having worshipped the serpent or Naga. For the present, it will suffice

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serpent deity. Sometimes it is a single snake, the hood of the cobra being spread open. Occasionally, the sculptured figures are nine in number, and this form is called the "Nao nag", and is intended to represent a parent and eight of its young ; but the prevailing form is that of two snakes twining in the manner of the Esculapian rod.' Speaking of the village gods, Meadows Taylor says : 'The worship of Grama Devatas, or village divinities, is universal all over the Dekhan, and indeed, I believe, throughout India. These divinities have no temples nor priests. Sacrifice and oblation are made to them at sowing time and harvest, for rain or fair weather, in times of cholera, malignant fever, or other disease or pestilence. The Nag is always one of the Grama Devatas, the rest being known by local names. The Grama Devatas are known as heaps of stones, generally in a grove or quiet spot near every village, and are smeared, some with black and some with red colour.' See Fergusson's *Tree and Serpent Worship,* Appendix D.

to say that the Aryans gradually made themselves masters of the greater part of northern and eastern India; and then filtered towards the south, and carried the Aryan civilisation and culture to the Dravidian populations of the Peninsula.

Vedic Aryan Religion

The religion of the Aryans had a different origin than that of the Dravidian people. The Aryan religion may possibly have been a development of the ancient worship of the genii loci—the spirits of the hills, forests, glens and streams. To this day, many of the hill tribes in eastern India, between Bengal and Arakan, still practise this simple worship in its most primitive form. They people the little world around them with unseen beings, the guardians of their village, tribe, and dwelling; and they propitiate these spirits or genii with offerings of fowls and pigs, served up with boiled rice and fermented liquors. Again, the Dravidians, as already seen, worship village and household deities. But the religion of the Vedic Aryans was of a far more intellectual character. It finds its highest expression in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, which are composed by the Aryan bards known as Rishis. In these ancient Sanskrit hymns, the genii loci, or guardian deities, scarcely appear, and the gods that are worshipped are deified conceptions of the spirits who pervaded fire, water, and sky; the sun, the rivers, and the early dawn, were propitiated as substantive existences, as well as spiritual existences. Agni was the deity of fire, which illuminates the universe and lights up the domestic house-

hold. Varuna was the deity of water, and the ruling spirit of the deep seas. Indra was the god of the sky, who pierced the rain cloud and brought down the waters, and was thus especially the god of harvests. Surya was the sun god, and subsequently became involved in the conception of Agni. The rivers were all worshipped as individual deities; and the river Saraswati, which was a kind of frontier between the Punjab and the rest of India, was especially hymned by the ancient Rishis. Ushas was the deity of early dawn, and was perhaps the most poetical of all the Vedic conceptions, for she was arrayed as a white-robed maiden, who awakens a sleeping world as a mother awakens her children. But the great deity of the Rishis was Agni, the deity of the fire and light, who ultimately became the incarnation of justice and purity.[7]

The religious worship of the Rishis consisted of praise, propitiation, and prayer. They praised their gods as men laud their sovereign. They propitiated them with so-called sacrifices, which were simply portions of their daily meals, and consisted of rice, milk, butter, cakes, grain, and curds; and sometimes of a fermented liquor known as soma juice. In return for these simple offerings, they prayed for material blessings, such as health, strength, prosperity, brimming harvests, plenty of sons, and abundance of cattle and horses. When the meal was prepared,

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7. A large number of the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* were translated by H.H. Wilson, and published in 4 vols., 8 vols. The translation, however, is based upon the Brahmanical interpretation of Sayana Acharya, the commentator, who flourished as late as the fourteenth century in the Christian era. Another, and more trustworthy, translation of the original hymns was being carried out by Max Müller.

they strewed the eating-place with sacred grass, and invited the make-believe gods to take their seats and eat and drink their fill. They then poured a portion of their food upon the sacred fire, which was personified as a divine messenger who carried the sacrifice to the several deities; and when this was done, the family apparently sat down and feasted on the remainder. The ideas connected with this religious ceremonial may perhaps be inferred from the following brief paraphrase, in which an attempt is made to indicate the spirit of the Vedic hymns:

'We praise thee, O Agni, for thy presence in our dwelling is as welcome as that of a wife or a mother: Consume our sacrifice and grant our prayers, or carry away our offerings to the other gods. We praise thee, O Varuna, for thou art mighy to save: Have mercy upon us on the deep seas. We praise thee, O Indra, for thou art our god and our protector: Drive hither with thy champing, foaming steeds, and eat and drink the good things we have provided; and then, O strong and valiant god, fix thy mind on the good things thou art to give to us: Give us riches ! Give us a long life ! Give us vigorous sons ! Give us plentiful harvests and abundance of cattle and horses. We praise thee, O Surya, for thou art the god who illuminates the universe. We praise thee, O Saraswati, for thou art the best and purest of rivers; we pray thee to fertilise our lands and cherish us with blessings. O Ushas, daughter of heaven, dawn upon us with riches: O diffuser of light, dawn upon us with abundant food: O beautiful goddess, dawn upon us with a wealth of cattle.'[8]

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8. Hymns of the *Rig-Veda,* translated by H.H. Wilson, *passim.*

Earlier and Later Conceptions

The Vedic hymns, however, are not the products of a single age. Their compostion extended over many centuries, and they therefore refer to many widely different stages in the progress of a civilisation. Thus some belong to a pastoral or agricultural period, when men lived a half-savage life in scattered settlements, and were threatened on all sides by barbarous enemies, cattle-lifters, and night-plunderers. Others, again, were produced in an age when men dwelt in luxury in fortified cities, when merchants traded to distant lands, when ladies were decked with silks and jewels, and when kings dwelt in palaces, drove in chariots, and indulged in polygamy. Again, the hymns represent different phases of religious development. Some are the mere child-like outpourings of natural piety; whilst others are the expression of intellectual and spiritual yearnings for a higher conception of deity, until all the gods are resolved into one Spiritual Being, the divine Sun, the Supreme Soul who pervades and governs the universe.[9]

Multiplicity of deities

The Vedic pantheon was not ccnfined to the deities named, but comprised a vast number of other spiritual existences. Indeed,

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9. This idea of a Supreme Soul does not appear to have been an original Vedic idea. It was more probably grafted on the Vedic hymns by the later Brahmanical commentators. The point will be further treated in dealing with the religion of the Brahmans.

the Vedic people imagined deities to reside in every object, animate and inanimate. They saw deities in the lightning, the rain, the cloud, the mountain, the wind, the flowing stream, the weapon, the plough, and the sickle. This religious worship, child-like as it appears, served to develop the affections and was invested with a moral meaning. The deities were regarded with reverential affection, as well as with pious devotion; and the belief in the existence of guardian genii in all directions was a powerful check against the commission of acts which were likely to offend the deity.[10]

Vedic and Brahmanic periods

The term Vedic is here borrowed from the *Rig-Veda,* which is a very ancient collection of hymns, or mantras, addressed to different deities who will be presently described. These hymns are of considerable value, inasmuch as they did not originally form part of a laboured and artificial ritual, but are the genuine outpourings of simple minds, eagerly praying to the gods for

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10. Compare Manu. One of the characters in the Hindu Drama of the 'Toy Cart' declines to commit a crime which will be witnessed by all the genii around. See Wilson's *Hindu Theatre,* vol. i. It is difficult to say whether the hosts of spirit-deities, still worshipped by the Hindus, are of Aryan or Turanian origin. It is, however, certain that their worship existed for ages before the advent of the Brahmans. Three classes of deities seem to have been recognised, namely, village gods, house gods, and personal or patron gods. They are known respectively as Grama Devatas, Kula Devatas, and Ishta Devatas.

material and temporal blessings.[11] Evidence will be furnished, hereafter, to show that the Vedic age was one in which the main traditions of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* seem to have taken place; whilst the Brahmanic age, which succeeded the Vedic period, was the one in which the two poems were composed. The leading points of difference between the Vedic and the Brahmanic periods may be thus indicated. In the Vedic period, the Brahmans were scarcely known as a separate community; the caste system had not been introduced, and gods were worshipped who were subsequently superseded by deities of other names and other forms. In the Brahmanic period, the Brahmans had formed themselves into an exclusive ecclesiastical hierarchy, endowed with

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11. The Vedas are four in number, but the first and oldest, known as the *Rig-Veda,* is the one which principally demands attention, as the other three belong to a subsequent and ritualistic age, and indeed are little more than recasts of the *Rig-Veda.* (See Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, vol. I. Introduction ; also Goldstücker's paper in the *English Cyclopaedia* upon the Vedas.) The four Vedas are respectively termed the *Rig-Veda,* the *Yajur-Veda,* the *Sama-Veda,* and the *Atharva-Veda.*

Each Veda is divided into two parts, viz :

(i) The Hymns or Mantras, which express the wants and aspirations of the worshippers, and thereby throw some light upon the social conditions of the people.

(ii) The Brahmans, who belong to a ritualistic age, and refer to rites and ceremonies, of a meaningless or artificial character, although of course a mystic significance is ascribed to each. The Aitareya Brahmana is, however, of some value, as it illustrates the Brahmanical sacrifices of animals which were practised in that early age of Brahmanical ascendancy which partly preceded and partly overlapped the age of Buddhism. The Sanskrit text of the *Aitareya Brahmana,* together with an English translation, has recently been published by Haug.

vast spiritual powers to which even the haughtiest Rajas were compelled to bow. The caste system had been introduced in all its fullness, whilst the old Vedic gods were fast passing away from the memory of man, and giving place to the three leading Brahmanical deities—Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Again, the Vedic period is characterised by a patriarchal simplicity, which is wanting in the Brahmanic age, when the luxury and splendour of the Hindu Rąjas had reached a climax side by side with the increased power and influence exercised by the Brahmanical hierarchy. It will thus be seen that before entering into the story of the two epics, it will be advisable to glance more particularly at the civilisation and religion of the Vedic age, and thereby establish a standard by which to clear the events which they subsequently seem to have received from the hands of the Brahmanical compilers of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

The Vedic People

The Vedic people, whose wants and aspirations are expressed in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda,* are described as, 'fair-complexioned'. Aryas, or Aryans, had migrated at a remote period from some colder climate in central Asia, and subsequently settled in the Punjab, or the 'Land of the Five Rivers', in the north-western quarter of India, from whence, in the course of ages, they gradually pushed towards the east and the south. They seem to have been called 'fair-complexioned' in opposition to the darker complexioned tribes who had previously settled in India, and who are generally regarded as aborigines, and alluded

to under a variety of names, such as Rakshasas, Asuras, Danavas, Dasyus, and Daityas.[12] The simple patriarchal life of the Aryans is indicated in the Vedic hymns precisely as it is depicted in the main tradition of the *Mahabharata.* They were a people partly pastoral and partly agricultural; keeping cows for the sake of their milk, butter, and curds, and sowing the land with grain. They also seem to have had some acquaintance with the manufacture

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12. Whilst the term Aryan is applied to the Vedic invaders of India, the so-called aborigines are generally regarded as a Turanian race. These terms, Aryan and Turanians, are so frequently used that some explanation about their opposition seems necessary. In language, the difference is not only of roots but of grammars. In race, the Aryan comprises the Greek, the Roman, and the modern European, whose tendencies have been to form themselves into national and political communities, to marry one wife and to worship one supreme and spiritual deity. The Turanian, on the other hand, is represented by the modern Tartars, whose tendencies are apparently the reverse; they have little national or political cohesion, marry one or more wives without much sentiment, and worship gods and heroes without much idea of spiritual existence beyond that implied in the notion of ghosts and demons.

So far the opposition is intelligible, and the application of the terms Aryan and Turanian is convenient for the purpose of distinguishing one class of tendencies from another. But when the terms are broadly applied to families of mankind, and regarded as characteristics by which to distinguish the members of one great family from those of another, they are apt to mislead. Both the Aryan and the Turanian elements spring from a common human nature, and do not arise from a difference of instinct but from a difference of training, or rather a difference in the past and present conditions of national existence. Men speaking Aryan languages may abandon themselves to polygamous aspirations and to a superstitious reverence for material existences ; and in like manner, the Turanian may be led to feel that his highest bliss on earth is derived from his marriage to one wife, and that the most elevated form of worship is that of one God—the omniscient, the unseen, and the supreme.

of weapons and coats of mail, and to have sometimes undertaken sea-voyages for the sake of gain. These people prayed to their gods as such a people might be expected to pray, for plenty of rain, abundant harvests, and prolific cattle; for bodily vigour, long life, numerous progeny, and protection against all foes and robbers, such as the cattle-lifting aborigines.

Vedic deities

Their gods appear to have been mere abstractions; personifications of those powers of nature on whom they relied for good harvests. They wanted seasonable rain, warmth, and fresh breezes. Accordingly, they prayed to the god of rain, the god of fire and light, and the god of wind. But from the very first, there appears to have been some confusion in these personifications, which led both to a multiplicity of deities, and the confounding together of different deities. Thus the conception of the god of rain was Indra, and he was identified with the firmament as well as with the unseen power which smote the rain-cloud and brought down the waters; and so important was the acquisition of rain in due season that Indra is regarded as the sovereign of the gods, and subsequently became a type of sovereignty. But rain and water are, generally, different things, and thus there was another, and perchance an older, deity named Varuna, who was particularly worshipped as the god of the waters, and deity of the ocean. Again, the conception of the god of fire was Agni, and Agni was not only the flame which burns upon the hearth or altar, but also the lightning which manifests itself in the clouds, and even in the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Yet, both the sun and the moon appear as separate and individual deities, the former under the name of Surya, and the latter under the name of Soma or Chandra. Again, there seems to have been a striking difference as regards the wind. The god of wind, or air, was Vayu; but the different breezes which bring on or accompany the rain are called Maruts, and are represented as the attendants of Indra. Thus, whilst there is a pantheon of separate and individual deities, the conception of one deity frequently overlapped the conceptions of other deities; and whilst the more prominent powers of nature, such as water, fire, and wind, were separately individualised, a monotheistic tendency was always at work, ascribing the attributes of every deity to each one in turn. Of these deities, the following appear to be the most important:

Rain–Indra, god of the firmament. Varuna, god of the waters. Fire–Agni, god of fire. Surya, the Sun. Soma, or Chandra, the Moon. Air–Vayu, the god of wind. Maruts, the breezes who attended upon Indra.

Yama, the god of death, or judge of the dead

To these must be added a god of death, or judge of the dead, who was known as Yama. The characteristics of Yama as a Vedic deity would open up a large field of inquiry; but the subject at present is vague and speculative. In the epics, Yama appears distinctly as a judge of the dead; and men who are about to die are frequently said to be about to go to the mansions of Yama.

Fanciful personifications which appear to have been regarded as minor deities

The foregoing deities appear to have been the prominent gods in the Vedic pantheon; but there are yet many fanciful personifications to whom hymns were addressed, such as Earth,[13] Sky, Food, Wine, Months, Seasons, Day, Night, and Dawn. The religious ideas connected with these personifications are difficult to apprehend; and it can only be inferred that the abstractions were regarded as spiritual existences, and worshipped accordingly. Perchance a better acquaintance with the *Rig-Veda* may serve to solve the problem, for at present, philologists appear to be occasionally divided as regards the true meaning of passages; and indeed seem inclined to depend upon the interpretation of commentators who flourished thousands of years after the composition of the hymns, when the national mind had been entirely recast in a Brahmanical mould.[14]

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13. In a later and more mystical age, Earth became personified as the cow ; but the conception of Earth in the *Rig-Veda* is more simple and primitive.

14. The chronology of the Vedas is still a subject of discussion, but the data are vague and unsatisfactory. The *Rig-Veda* has been referred to in about the twelfth or fifteenth century before Christ, and would thus synchronise with the Hebrew conquest of Canaan ; but still it cannot be denied that some of the hymns may be of a far earlier date, whilst the composition of others may have belonged to a much later age. The popular appreciation, however, of the Vedic hymns and the Vedic deities seems to have died away in the subsequent ages of Brahmanism and Buddhism, and later commentators must have proceeded to the task of interpretation with their minds deeply imbued with the religious ideas of the Brahmanic period. The

The form of worship which prevailed amongst the Vedic Aryans throws still further light upon the simplicity of ancient rites and ideas. Indeed, their whole religious system may be regarded as child-like and make-believe. They appear to have had no idols and no temples, but either performed their sacrifice in the open air, or else in a sacrificial chamber set apart in each dwelling. The so-called sacrifice was nothing more than the preparation of such simple viands as clarified butter, curds, wine, cakes, and parched grain; and the presentation of such articles to the different deities through the medium of fire. In other words, having deified certain abstractions, they personified such abstractions as beings with human wants and aspirations; and then invoked the gods with hymns to attend to and partake of the food which had been prepared for them, and made believe that the gods accepted the invitation. Moreover, the offerings do not appear to have been always of a bloodless character, for Indra is described as rejoicing in roasted buffalo, and it is certain that a horse was occasionally sacrificed either to Indra or to the Sun.

Religious rites connected with eating and drinking, and performed at every meal

These religious rites were thus intimately connected with eating and drinking, and appear to have been performed at dawn,

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most famous commentator of the *Rig-Veda* was Sayana Acharya, who flourished during the fourteenth century of the Christian era, or about three thousand years after the composition of the works upon which he commented; an interval corresponding to that which separates the books of Joshua and Judges from some of our early English divines.

noon and sunset. Accordingly, it is easy to conceive that they may have formed an accompaniment to every meal, and may have been regarded almost as a part of the cookery. Thus the hymns may have been the expression of the aspirations of a simple people whilst the food was being cooked; and the so-called sacrifice may have been nothing more than the propitiation of the gods by the presentation of a portion of the victuals and liquors. Indeed, the preparations for cooking and sacrifice would be much the same. A fire would be kindled upon the ground, or upon a raised altar; the food would be either baked, or toasted, or boiled in kettles; bundles of a common but sacred species of grass, known as Kusa grass, would be sprinkled all round the altar for the make-believe gods to sit upon, and upon which the worshippers also sat themselves; ghee and soma juice[15] would be presented to the fire in ladles; and the god of fire would be invoked in a Vedic hymn, either to accept the offering, or to carry it away in flame to the other gods; after which the worshippers themselves partook of the meal which had been provided. Of course, such preparations would vary with the importance of the occasion. At the daily meal, it may have been deemed sufficient to chant a few strains, and sprinkle a little ghee on the fire and grass; but on a set

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15. Wilson's *Rig-Veda,* vol. I. Introduction, p. (*xxiii*). The soma plant is the Acid Asclepias, or Sarcostema Viminalis, which yields copious milky juice of a mild nature and sub-acid taste. It does not appear to have been used in sacrifices until it had gone through the process of fermentation, and had become a strong spiritual beverage. Ib. p. 6, *note.*

occasion, such as a marriage, an installation of a chieftain, or an assertion of sovereignty, the soma juice would be elaborately prepared in large quantities, and presented to the invisible gods with curds, cakes, ghee, and milk; and the so-called sacrifice would be followed by a great feast amongst the guests assembled. In the hymns recited on such festivals, the worshippers would exult in the joy and satisfaction which the gods would feel in quaffing the soma, or in consuming the choice viands which had been prepared. In one vigorous hymn, it is said that the gods, filled with food, are as impatient to enjoy the soma as bridegrooms long for their brides.[16] Sometimes a deity is supposed to be attracted by the grating sound of the stone and mortar by which the soma juice was extracted from the plant; or by the musical noise of the churning-sticks by which the wine was apparently stirred up and mixed with curds; and the eager invokers implore the god not to turn aside to the dwelling of any other worshipper, but to come to them only, and drink the libation which they had prepared, and reserve for them all his favours and benefits. Indeed, the relations between the Vedic Aryans and their deities appear to have been of a child-like and filial character; the evils which they suffered, they ascribed to some offence of omission or commission which had been given to a deity; whilst the good which they received was in like manner ascribed to his kindness and favour.

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16. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 83, v. 2. Wilson's translation. It may here be noted that all references are made to Wilson's translation of the *Rig-Veda,* unless otherwise stated.

However, in order to apprehend the general scope and character of the religious ideas of the Vedic Aryans more fully, it may be advisable to indicate, with a greater degree of detail, the leading characteristics of those deities who are prominent both in the epics and the *Rig-Veda.*

The most prominent and popular deity in the Vedic ritual appears to be Indra, the giver of rain, and subsequently regarded as the sovereign of the gods. This deity, more than any of the others, is represented in the character of a human hero rather than as a spiritual divinity, or, in other words, is more distinctly and intensely personified. It is true that he appears prominently as the god of the firmament, the hurler of the thunderbolt who smote the rain-cloud and brought down the waters; and his worshippers implore him for blessings, such as robust health and plentiful harvests, long life and numerous progeny, and other good things of this world, which none but this deity can bestow. But in many of the hymns, he is represented as a warrior chief, endowed perhaps with supernatural strength and energy, but still with more of the human than of the miraculous type, and who especially shielded and protected those who were his foes.[17] Moreover, he is frequently addressed in familiar terms, and in tones of remonstrance, which are incompatible with the idea of an omniscient and invisible deity. He is supposed to take special delight in quaffing the soma juice; and his capacity for drinking

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17. Comp. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymns 51 and 55, for the human character of Indra.

it is celebrated with all the sympathetic praise and exaggerated description with which the northern bards loved to celebrate the bacchanalian exploits of their heroes in the olden times. Indeed, he is hymned as the discoverer of the soma plant, which was said to have been brought from heaven, and to have previously lain hidden in a rock like the nestling of a bird.[18] In many passages, however, as already stated, his existence seems to have been spiritualised until he becomes a mere personified idea of the god of the sky or the firmament, and the winds are declared to be his followers, with whom he battles against the clouds in order to release the rain. Even in this capacity, the popular imagination still delighted in depicting him in a human form, driving furiously in a chariot drawn by champing and foaming steeds; as the hero and protector of the fair-complexioned Aryans, who worshipped him with acceptable hymns and large oblations, and the enemy and destroyer of the black-complexioned aborigines—the Rakshasas, the Dasyus, the Asuras, the Krishuas, and the Pisachas—who neither sang his praises nor offered him the delicious and inebriating soma. He was thus a national deity, showering gifts upon his worshippers, but trampling upon those who gave him no libations, as a strong man tramples upon a coiled-up snake. He slew his enemies by thousands, and destroyed their cities by hundreds; he brought back the spoil, and recovered the cows which they had carried away. His worshippers called upon him to hasten, assail, subdue; to destroy his enemies with

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18. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 130, v. 3.

his thunderbolt; to smite the rain-cloud Vritra and bring down the waters :[19]

'Slayer of Vritra, ascend thy chariot, for thy horses have been yoked by prayer; may the sound of the stone that bruises the soma attract thy mind towards us.'[20]

'Showerer of benefits, destroyer of cities, propitiated by our new songs, reward us with gratifying blessings.'[21]

In one hymn, the worshippers are naively represented as saying; 'Quaff the soma juices, satiate thy appetite, and then fix thy mind on the wealth that is to be given to us.'[22] In another, Indra is told that the minds of his worshippers adhere to him, as affectionate wives to a loving husband.[23] Thus there are verses which describe him as a mere human chief, a strong man rejoicing in his strength, a warrior delighting in war, as well as in eating and drinking; and there are others in which his deeds and attributes are lauded with an exaggeration which renders his deification complete :

'He who, as soon as born, is the first of the deities, who has done honour to the gods by his exploits; he at whose might heaven and earth are alarmed, and who is known by the greatness of his strength; he, men, is Indra.

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19. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 80, v. 3.

20. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 87, v. 3.

21. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 130, v. 10.

22. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 54, v. 9.

23. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 62, v. 11.

'He who fixed firm the moving earth ; who tranquillised the incensed mountains; who spread the spacious firmament; who consolidated the heavens; he, men, is Indra.

'He who, having destroyed Ahi,[24] set free the seven rivers; who recovered the cows detained by Bala; who generated fire in the clouds; who is invincible in battle; he, men is Indra.

'He under whose control are horses and cattle, and villages, and all chariots; who gave birth to the sun and to the dawn ; and who is the leader of the waters; he, men, is Indra.

'He to whom heaven and earth bow down ; he at whose might the mountains are appalled; he who is the drinker of the soma juice, the firm of frame, the adamant armed, the wielder of the thunderbolt; he, men, is Indra.[25]

'May we envelop thee with acceptable praises, as youthful husbands are embraced by their wives.' [26]

Characteristics of Agni or Fire

Another famous Vedic deity, and one who is perhaps superior to Indra, although he never acquired the sovereignty of the gods, is Agni or Fire. Even to the eye of the man of science there is

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24. Ahi is another name for Vritra, or the rain-cloud. Sometimes Vritra, or Ahi, is represented as a heavy cloud charged with water, and sometimes as a chief among the aboriginal tribes with whom the Aryas are at war.

25. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. II. Hymn 12, v. 1, 2, 3, 7, 13.

26. *Rig-Veda.* Mand. II. Hymn 16, v. 8.

something spiritual in the varied manifestations of fire, and something divine in its powers of destruction and purification. To this must be added the fact that in colder climates, like that from which the Vedic Aryans appear to have emigrated, the presence of fire is associated with home pleasures and family ties, and the domestic hearth becomes a vivid conception embodying pleasant memories and warm affections. But to man in a primitive state of existence, the presence of fire excites feelings of reverence. Its powers raise it to the rank of a deity whose operations are felt and seen. It burns and it consumes. It dispels darkness, and with it drives away not only the imaginary horrors which the mind associates with darkness, but also the real horrors, such as beasts of prey. In its lower manifestations as mere heat, it cooks the food and warms the dwelling, and enables the artisan to forge weapons for the warrior, or to fashion jewelled ornaments to enliven the charms of female beauty. In its higher manifestations, it becomes identified with the light of the sun and the moon; with the lightning which shoots from the sky and shatters the loftiest trees and strikes down the strongest man; with the deity who covers the field with grain and ripens the harvest; with the divine messenger who licks up the sacrifice and carries it to the gods. Thus fire was regarded by the Vedic Aryans, in every way, as a sacred thing; and, as if to associate this deity with all that is nearest and dearest to the human heart, a fire was considered to be indispensable to the due performance of the marriage ceremony; and the presence of fire as a divine witness was deemed in some instances sufficient to sanctify the union of an impatient and impassioned pair.

Agni or Fire, represented in various forms

Thus Agni, or Fire, is depicted in the Vedas in a variety of forms : as a priest, a divine messenger, a devouring element, and a deity who is the source and diffuser of light throughout the universe. In some hymns, he is personified as an immortal being enjoying perpetual youth, and travelling in a car drawn by red horses.[27] He is frequently invoked as a priest, and like an officiating priest, he is said to have brought prosperity to the worshipper. As a divine messenger, he was implored to bring the gods to the sacrifice,[28] and the loving wives of the gods to partake of the soma juice.[29] As a devouring element, he is invoked as the bright and purifying deity who was charged with all the invocations of the gods; whilst the mere operations of Agni, as a consuming fire, are frequently described in language eminently poetical. 'When generated from the rubbing of sticks, the radiant Agni bursts forth from the wood like a fleet courser.'[30] 'When excited by the wind, he rushes amongst the trees like a bull, and consumes the forest as a King destroys his enemies.' 'His path is blackened, and the birds are terrified at his roaring.'[31] In his more domestic capacity, Agni is described as an ornament in the sacrificial

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27. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 36, v. 15 ; Mand. IV. v. 8.

28. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 31, v. 17.

29. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 22, v. 9.

30. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. V. Hymn 29, v. 6.

31. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 58, v. 4 ; Hymn 65, v. 4 ; Hymn 94, v. 10 and 11.

chamber, like a woman in a dwelling.[32] He is young and goldenhaired, the domestic guardian, the protector against evil spirits, malevolent men, and noxious animals.[33] Like the divine Sun, he is the supporter of the universe, but he dwells on earth like a prince surrounded by faithful friends, and men sit down in his presence like sons in the dwelling of a father. 'Such as thou art, Agni, men preserve thee constantly kindled in their dwellings, and offer upon thee abundant food : Do thou, in whom is all existence, be the bearer of riches.'[34] But there are still passages referring to Agni, as indeed there are verses referring to almost every other Vedic deity, in which that individual god is represented as supreme and absolute.[35] Thus in two particular hymns, Agni is called the ruler of the universe, the lord of men, the wise king, the father, the brother, the son, the friend of men; whilst the powers and even the names of the other deities are distinctly

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32. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 66, v. 3.

33. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 36, v. 5, 15.

34. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 73. The whole of this hymn is singularly illustrative of the worship of Agni.

35. This coexistence of monotheism and polytheism is very clearly explained by Max Müller in the following very eloquent passage: 'When these individual gods are invoked, they are not conceived as limited by the power of others, as superior or inferior in rank. Each god is to the mind of the supplicant as good as all the gods. He is felt, at the time, as a real divinity—as supreme and absolute, inspite of the necessary limitations which, to our mind, a plurality of gods must entail on every single god. All the rest disappear for a moment from the vision of the poet, and he only who is to fulfil their desires stands in full light before the eyes of the worshippers.' *Hist. of Ancient Sanskrit Literature,* p. 532.

applied to this god.[36] Care must, however, be taken not to confound the language of praise with the expression of thought. The extravagance of adulation will permit a Hindu courtier to address some petty chief or king as the king of kings, but this by no means implies an idea of universal empire. At the same time the language of praise, eager to propitiate and boundless in expression, may, to some extent, have originated the later conception of the one Supreme Being, the God above all gods, which is undoubtedly to be found in the Vedas.

Indra and Agni, the chief gods of the *Rig-Veda*

These two deities—Indra and Agni, Rain and Fire—are the chief gods who were worshipped by the Vedic Aryans. In the hymns they are sometimes identified with each other, and sometimes associated in the same hymn; but even as individuals, more hymns were apparently addressed to each than to any other divine being in the Vedic pantheon.

The remaining gods, however, though less prominent and perhaps less popular, are still well worthy of attention. They comprise the personifications of water, the sun and the moon, air and the winds, all of which were associated with the ideas of the deity.

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36. *Rig-Veda*, Mand. I. Hymns 1 and 2. Comp. Max Müller, *Hist. of Sanskrit Lit.*, p. 533.

Characteristics of Varuna or Water

The god of water was named Varuna.[37] Next to fire, perhaps water has always occupied the most prominent place in the religious worship of nations, in general. It purifies, and it is an emblem of purity; and is as necessary in every household as fire. At the same time, the ever-flowing current of a great river awakens the ideas of life and infinity; of a past and a future; of going on ever and ever, we know not whence and we know not where, but ever flowing. Springs and rivers, however, are generally separated into individual abstractions, which are personified as divine beings; and the highest conception of one universal god of the waters seems to have been gathered from a familiarity with the sea. Thus amongst a maritime people, the god of the ocean, the lord of tempests, the ruler of the rushing, boiling waves, ever occupies an important place in the sphere of religious thought ; and here, it should be remarked that the Vedic Aryans were evidently acquainted with the sea, for the hymns contain allusions to merchants, to sea voyages, and to ships with a hundred oars. In a more material or credulous age, this deity might be depicted as a mere monster, half-fish and half-human; but in the higher Aryan conception, he is represented as a spiritual existence, powerful to destroy but mighty to save, that could sink the strong man into

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[37]Upon this point there is some obscurity. Varuna was undoubtedly regarded as the deity of water, but the name is in some verses applied to the sun and even to the personification of day. In the epics he is invariably regarded as water, and is emphatically the god of the ocean.

the depths of the sea, or bear him in safety to the shore. At a later stage, the conception rises higher and higher until a deity is shadowed forth that rewards goodness and punishes sin. The following hymn to Varuna, felicitously translated by Max Müller, exhibits this deity in the two-fold character of controlling tempests and punishing sin; and in so doing indicates a tone of religious feeling not so far removed from modern ideas as might have been expected :

'Let me not yet, O Varuna, enter into the house of clay; have mercy, almighty, have mercy !

'If I go along trembling, like a cloud driven by the wind; have mercy, almighty, have mercy !

'Through want of strength, thou strong and bright god, have I gone to the wrong shore; have mercy, almighty, have mercy !

'Thirst came upon the worshipper, though he stood in the midst of the waters; have mercy, almighty, have mercy !

'Whenever we men, O Varuna, commit an offence before the heavenly host, whenever we break thy law through thoughtlessness ; have mercy, almighty, have mercy.'[38]

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38. Max Müller, *History of Sanskrit Literature,* p. 540.

Characteristics of Surya, or the Sun

Surya, or the Sun, is another important Vedic deity; and indeed seems, under different names, to have always held a high place amongst the primitive gods of every nation, by virtue of its prominence in the heavens, and the extent to which its influence is felt upon the earth. Its daily course and its annual course, its welcome rising in the morning and its glorious setting in the evening, must all have excited the keenest curiosity amongst a child-like and inquisitive people; and, at the same time, the imagination alone was left to account for the existence of phenomena which, in a non-scientific age, are altogether beyond human ken. Thus it seems extremely probable that one of the earliest efforts of the poetical genius was to personify the sun as the deity of light, travelling through the blue ether in a golden chariot which all men might see, drawn, however, by steeds which were invisible to the outward eye, but which were easily assumed to be white, resplendent, and beautiful beyond expression. In the Vedas, the attributes of this deity are frequently the same as those of Agni, especially that of originating and diffusing light; but still the Sun stands forward as a deity altogether distinct from Fire, when described as journeying through the firmament in an upward and downward course, and especially in his character of measuring days and nights. This god is apparently addressed under a variety of names, such as Surya, Savitri, Mitra, Aryaman, and others; but in the epics he is chiefly known by the name of Surya, and was regarded as the great ancestor of the solar race which appear in the *Ramayana*. In the higher conceptions, the divine

Sun is regarded and invoked as a spirit pervading all things, as the soul of the world and supporter of the universe,[39] and this idea is said to be indicated in the celebrated Vedic verse known as the Gayatri, which down to the present day still forms a part of the daily devotions of the Brahman.[40]

In connection with the worship of the Sun, there are some obscure deities, known as the Adityas.[41] These are said to be the sons of Aditi, who is apparently identified with the universe.[42] It

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39. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 73, v. 3.

40. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. III. Hymn 62, v. 10. The original Sanskrit of this verse appears to be simple enough. Wilson's translation is as follows:

'We meditate on that desirable light of the divine Savitri, who influences our pious rites.' William Jones' paraphrastic translation was as follows:

'Let us adore the supremacy of that divine Sun, the godhead, who illuminates all, who recreates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understandings aright in our progress towards his holy seat.' Colebroke proposes the following version:

'Earth ! Sky ! Heaven ! Let us meditate on (these and on) the most excellent light and power of that generous, sportive and resplendent Sun (praying that), it may guide our intellects.'

From information gathered personally from educated Brahmans, the writer has been led to infer that Colebroke's translation exhibits the nearest approximation to the religious ideas involved in the words. The verse is apparently an invocation to the several deities who are implored by the worshipper to aid his intellect in the apprehension and adoration of god.

41. Comp. Wilson, *Rig-Veda,* vol. I. Introd. p. (*xxxiii*). Also Muir's *Sanskrit Texts,* part IV, p. 101.

42. The Vedic verse is as follows: 'Aditi is heaven; Aditi is the firmament; Aditi is mother, father, and son; Aditi is all the gods; Aditi is the five classes of men; Aditi is generation and birth.' Upon this verse Sayana remarks: 'Aditi is hymned as the same with the universe.' Wilson, *Rig-Veda,* vol. I, p. 230, and *note.*

is not sufficiently clear how these Adityas were regarded by the Vedic worshippers, but at a later period they were apparently identified with the twelve signs of the zodiac, or rather with the Sun in twelve different characters, each character corresponding to the sign through which it passed in succession. The most important fact connected with this circle of divinities is that the god Vishnu, so prominent in the later mythologies, appears in the *Rig-Veda* merely as one of the Adityas. Also Aryaman, Mitra, Varuna, and Savitri are identified both with the Sun and with certain Adityas.

Characteristic of the minor Vedic deities

Of the remaining Vedic deities but little remains to be said. Their individual characters may be easily inferred from their names, whilst their form of worship appears to differ in no way from that of the deities already described. Soma, or the Moon, which appears in some pantheons as a female divinity corresponding to the male personification of the sun, is chiefly celebrated in the Vedas in connection with the soma plant ; but it appears in the *Mahabharata* indifferently under the names of Chandra and Soma, as the mythical progenitor of the great Lunar race of Bharata. Two obscure deities, known as the Aswins, are apparently the personification of light and moisture, and as sons of the Sun seem sometimes to be identified and multiplied as the Sun's rays.[43] They are invoked in several hymns, but do not

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43. In the epics, they are said to have been the physicians of the gods, and are constantly represented as twins.

appear to have been invested with any peculiar attributes, beyond that of being young and handsome, and riding on horses. The deifications of Vayu, or the air, and of the Maruts, or the winds, are frequently invoked, in many instances, in conjunction with Indra and Agni. The Maruts, especially whose power was manifest, are described in such figurative language as is usually applied to the strong and impetuous winds by poets of all nations and ages. In this way they are depicted as roaring amongst the forest trees, and blowing up the clouds for rain; but they are also personified in the imaginations of the Vedic psalmists as youthful warriors bearing lances on their shoulders, delighting in the soma juice like Indra, and, like him, the bestowers of benefits upon their worshippers.

Characteristics of Ushas, or the dawn

The next Vedic deity to be taken into consideration is Ushas, or the personification of the dawn. This divinity scarcely appears in the epics, and can hardly have been extensively worshipped, but yet is especially deserving of notice from the remarkable contrast which the conception presents to those of other gods, and especially to the idea of Indra. In the place of the impetuous warrior, strong and drunk with wine, and cleaving the clouds with his thunderbolt, we have the vision of early morning, of the first pale flush of light, imaged as a pure and lovely maiden awakening a sleeping world, as a young wife awakens her children. This poetical conception seems to have had peculiar charms for

the old Vedic bards; and, in truth, the dawn of early morning in India is singularly favourable for such feelings, and in the mind of the Vedic worshipper was associated with early prayer as well as with early duties. In addition to the refreshing coolness and delightful stillness of the hour, there is a peculiar whiteness in the atmosphere, not so expressive as moonlight, but infinitely more delicate and more suggestive of innocence and purity. Thus the night with all the horrors of darkness—the fear of ghosts, demons, snakes, tigers, and midnight robbers— is supposed to have passed away before the rising of this white-robed maiden, the first in all the world who is awake, and the first to appear at the invocation of the gods. But notwithstanding the unsubstantial character of the original personification, it nevertheless became in many hymns a vivid conception of a deity. As a mere female, Ushas is likened to a young bride, with perhaps more warmth of painting than would suit modern taste:

'Goddess, manifest in person like a maiden, thou goest to the resplendent and beautiful Sun; and, like a youthful bride before her husband, thou uncoverest thy bosom with a smile.'[44]

Vedic ideas of Ushas as a deity

But as a divinity, the language respecting Ushas is much more elevated:

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44. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 123, v. 1.

'Ushas, daughter of heaven, dawn upon us with riches; diffuser of light, dawn upon us with abundant food; beautiful goddess, dawn upon us with wealth of cattle.[45]

'This auspicious Ushas has harnessed her vehicles from afar, above the rising of the Sun, and she comes gloriously upon man with a hundred chariots.[46]

'First of all the world is she awake, triumphing over transitory darkness; the mighty, the giver of light, from on high she beholds all things; ever youthful, ever reviving, she comes first to the invocation.'[47]

Such were the chief gods of the Aryans, and to them may be added some others less prominent, such as the personifications of food, of day and night, and of the seasons. These require no special description, inasmuch as they are little more than poetical personifications; and probably at the period of their composition, they were as little connected with religious worship as the songs of Hafiz were connected with the sentiments of Islamic devotion. These creations of the fancy have ever been the favourite products of the Aryan mind, and thus the Vedic 'Hymn to Pitri, the

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45. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 48, v. 1.

46. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 48, v. 7.

47. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 123, v. 2.

Divinity of Food,'[48] is even surpassed in intensity of personification by Burns' ballad of 'John Barleycorn', and Tennyson's exquisite poem on the 'Death of the Old Year'.[49]

Vedic Conception of one Supreme Being

Having thus sketched, generally, the individual character of the leading deities of the Aryans as they appear in the *Rig-Veda,* it may be advisable to glance at that conception of the one Supreme Being, as in all and above all, which finds full expression in the Vedic hymns. Upon this point the following passages will be found very significant:

'Who has seen the primeval being at the time of his being born; what is that endowed with substance which the unsubstantial sustains; from earth are the breath and blood, but where is the soul; who may repair to the sage to ask this ?[50]

'What is that One alone, who has upheld these six spheres in the form of an unborn ?[51]

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48. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 187.

49. The great master in the power of personifying abstractions, until they become objects of actual interest, is John Bunyan; an interest, however, which is derived more from the religious experiences of the author than from a large knowledge of human nature.

50. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 144, v. 4.

51. *Rig-Veda,* Mand I. Hymn 144, v. 6.

The following hymn, translated by Max Müller, still further expresses the conception of monotheism, and indeed seems to indicate that the idea itself is a necessary one forced upon the mind by a thoughtful consideration of the phenomena of the universe.[52]

'In the beginning there arose the Source of golden light; He was the only born lord of all that is. He established the earth, and this sky: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

'He who gives life. He who gives strength; whose blessing all the bright gods desire; whose shadow is immortality; whose shadow is death: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

'He who through His power is the only King of the breathing and awakening world: He who governs all, man and beast: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

'He whose power these snowy mountains, whose power the sea proclaims, with the distant river: He for whom these regions are as it were His two arms: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

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52. The translation which follows has been borrowed from Max Müller's *History of Sanskrit Literature,* p. 569. That eloquent scholar is perhaps mistaken in alluding to the idea as 'an instinctive monotheism'. The theory that the Aryan nations may possess an instinct which is denied to the Turanian people seems untenable. An instinct is an element of human nature, and not a mere characteristic of a race ; and it appears more probable that what are called characteristics of a race, arise from peculiarities of development and history rather than from any original diversity in human nature.

'He through whom the sky is bright and the earth firm: He through whom the heaven was established, nay, the highest heaven: He who measured out the light in the air: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

'He to whom heaven and earth, standing firm by his will, look up, trembling inwardly: He over whom the rising sun shines forth: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

'Wherever the mighty water-clouds went, where they placed the seed and lit the fire, thence arose He who is the only life of the bright gods: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

'He who by his might looked even over the water clouds, the clouds which gave strength and lit the sacrifice, He who is God above all gods: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

'May He not destroy us, He, the creator of the earth; or He, the righteous, who created the heaven; He who also created the bright and mighty waters: Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?'

Vedic Conception of Marriage

The true conception of marriage involving the idea of the union of one woman to one man also finds expression in the Vedas. Husbands and wives in twos and twos are described as

presenting their oblations together;[53] and in one hymn, which dwells upon the duality of the two Aswins, the pair of deities are compared with pairs of almost everything that runs in couples, including a husband and a wife, and two lips uttering sweet sounds.[54]

Subsequent decay of the Vedic religion in the Brahmanic age

Such, then, were the leading characteristics of the principal deities of the Aryans in the old Vedic age, when the new colonists were still dwelling in the neighbourhood of the five rivers. During the subsequent age of Brahmanism, the spiritual conceptions and aspirations passed in a great measure away; a new dynasty of deities arose; and the gods of the Vedas lost their hold upon the national sympathies, and shrivelled more and more into human heroes with human instincts and passions. Meanwhile, the circumstances of the people and their geographical positions had undergone a great and significant change. In the Vedic age, the Aryans were a band of agriculturists and herdsmen, and were still dwelling in the neighbourhood of the Punjab; but in the Brahmanic age, they had become a conquering power, and had made their way

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53. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 131, v. 3. also Mand. Hymn 43.

54. *Rig-Veda,* Mand. II. Hymn 39. There is, however, an exceptional passage in which a young Rishi named Kakshivat celebrates the generosity of a Raja who had given him his ten daughters in marriage. (*Rig-Veda,* Mand. I. Hymn 126.) This reference to polygamy as well as two hymns relating to a horse sacrifice, will be considered hereafter.

down the fertile valleys of the Ganges and the Jamuna, and established kingdoms which are still famous in ancient stories. This period of conquest implies the existence of a large military class; and in connection with this subject, it may be remarked that the most significant change which appears to have taken place about this time was the institution of caste. In the Vedic age, there appears to have been no direct traces of a caste system; but in the Brahmanic age, the distribution of the people into castes is one of the most prominent features, and this caste system has prevailed more or less down to the present day. Thus the caste system seems to have arisen in the period which intervened between the Vedic and the Brahmanic age; in other words, between the time when the Aryans appeared as simple colonists in the land of the five rivers, and the time when they had become a conquering power, and established Aryan empires at Delhi, Oudh, Tirhut, and Behar, under the ancient names of Bharata, Kosala, Mithila, and Magadha. The question, accordingly, remains for consideration of how far the circumstances which attend the invasion of a well-populated country by a band of foreign emigrants, and the subsequent establishment of the settlers as a dominant and imperial power, are calculated to lead to the introduction of caste, and the perpetuation of a caste system for ages afterwards. This question is of a more general importance than is normally supposed. The tendency of all foreign conquests is to create a caste feeling between the conquerors and the conquered; and this feeling becomes intensified when the difference is one not merely of political relations, but of colour, language, and religion.

The question of how far the elements of an opposition of classes are to be found in the *Rig-Veda*

Many of the difficulties connected with this interesting subject of inquiry will be cleared up, as far as the Hindus are concerned, by means of the evidence furnished by the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. But it still appears necessary for the continuous identification of the Aryan people, and their separation from the Turanian populations by whom they were apparently surrounded, and with whom they must to some extent have intermingled, to ascertain which of the castes had an Aryan origin, and how far the elements of an opposition of classes is to be found in the *Rig-Veda*.

Four castes existing in the Brahmanic age

In the Brahmanic age, the great body of people were divided into four castes, as follows : (i) Brahmans, or priests ; sometimes called preceptors. (ii) Kshatriyas, or soldiers ; also called kings or sovereigns. (iii) Vaisyas, or merchants and farmers. (iv) Sudras, a servile class who tilled the soil.

Below these was a nondescript population treated as outcastes, who appear as the slaves of the Sudras. Of the four castes, the three first mentioned are distinguished from the fourth caste in a very particular manner. The Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas are each invested at a certain age with the sacred thread, from which circumstance they are entitled the 'twice born', to distinguish them from the Sudras, who are not permitted to

wear the thread. This line of demarcation between the three twice-born castes and the Sudras is far broader, according to caste ideas, than that between the Brahman and the Kshatriya, or the Kshatriya and the Vaisya. Accordingly, the most plausible conjecture appears to be that the three twice-born castes may be identified with the descendants of the Aryans of the *Rig-Veda;* whilst the Sudras, who form the mass of the population, may be regarded as the descendants of a Turanian people, who settled in India ages before the Aryans, at some remote period contemporary perhaps with the earliest Egyptian dynasties. As to the outcastes, they probably were the descendants of an aboriginal people possessing a still more remote antiquity, who were originally conquered by the Sudras, and of whom some may have escaped to the hills and become the ancestors of the existing hill tribes.

Three distinct classes of worshippers indicated in the *Rig-Veda*

Now, although no caste system appears in the *Rig-Veda,* the hymns certainly present glimpses of three distinct classes of worshippers. One class, the most prominent of all, comprised a people who evidently possessed strong religious instincts. They prayed in earnest language to primitive deities for such simple benefits as colonists in a new country might be expected to crave; namely, seasonal rains, abundant harvests, prolific cattle, and plenty of children. They were certainly a peaceful community, and appear to have been altogether indisposed to war, for they

prayed not for victory but for protection. They do not even seem to have sacrificed to any god of war, unless Indra may be regarded as such; but their offerings were exclusively made to what might be termed family or domestic deities, who were supposed to supply the daily wants of a simple but contemplative people. Moreover, with the exception of the soma wine, which was especially quaffed by Indra, there was nothing of an orgiastic character in their worship. They invoked the gods, and propitiated them with such bloodless offerings as butter, curds, and milk. Again, whilst they implored the gods for protection, and lauded their exploits against robbers, cattle-lifters, and other enemies, they manifested no warlike spirit, no direct aspiration for revenge, such as would find expression in the prayers or hymns of a people devoted to deeds of arms. Indeed, it might almost be said that the flow of religious feeling, which runs through the greater number of the Vedic hymns, is altogether at variance with that exultant delight in blood and slaughter which is generally manifested in the ballads of a warlike people. Altogether, the hymns of the *Rig-Veda,* as far as peaceful pursuits are concerned, are of such a character that it is not difficult to identify the people who gave them utterance with the ancestors of the later Brahmans.

A military class, the ancestors of the Kshatriyas

A second class of Vedic worshippers adopted a different order of religious rites, namely, the sacrifice of animals; thus they immolated horses to Indra and the Sun, and Indra is also said to have delighted in roasted buffalo. This difference in sacrifice

involved a difference of food and, in all probability, a difference of avocation. A peace-loving community might be contented with a milk and vegetable diet; but a military community, to whom physical strength was of the highest importance, would delight in flesh-meat, and such they would offer to the gods. It is a significant fact that the allusions to animal sacrifice are by no means frequent in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda,* whilst they find full expression in the ritualistic works of a later age, in which the Brahmans are represented as the sacrificers.[55] From this it may be inferred that so long as the Vedic Aryans were dwelling in the Punjab, the priestly orders still retained their bloodless sacrifices ; but as they advanced further and further into the interior, and depended more and more upon their military protectors, they found it more and more necessary to propitiate the warriors by the worship of their gods and the performance of animal sacrifices. The military community, thus referred to, may therefore be identified with the ancestors of the Kshatriyas.

A mercantile class, the ancestors of the Vaisyas

The third class of worshippers cannot be traced quite so easily, but glimpses are still to be obtained of a mercantile and maritime community, who especially worshipped Varuna, the god of the ocean, and who may be identified with the Vaisyas. Here, it may be remarked that no opposition seems ever to have arisen between the Vaisyas and the other two castes, like that which broke out

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55. See, especially, the Brahmanam Aitareya. Haug's translation.

between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas. Indeed, the wealth of the Vaisyas rendered them, at a later period, to considerable influence, inasmuch as they employed Brahmans to perform the sacrifices, and took Kshatriyas into their pay as soldiers and guards.

Origin of the difference between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas

The early separation of the Brahmans from the Kshatriyas, the priest from the soldier, is a question of much historical importance, and will be further discussed hereafter. For the present, it may be sufficient to remark that the separation does not appear to have originated so much in those superstitious caste ideas, which prevailed at a subsequent period, as in the difference of avocations, sentiments and aspirations. What the priest was to the the feudal chieftain of the Dark Ages, such was the Brahman to the Kshatriya. The Brahman subsisted on a diet of milk and vegetables, and spent his time in tending his flocks and herbs, in composing hymns to the different deities, and in speculative inquiries as to the origin of man and the universe, and their relationship to the Supreme Being. As to the history of the past, apart from religion, he cared for nothing except so far as he might succeed in converting ancient traditions into a vehicle for religious teaching. Accordingly, in a later age, he readily falsified those traditions for the purpose of promulgating Brahmanical ideas and exalting the pretensions of his own caste; and it was doubtless by this process that the Brahmans ultimately succeded in forming

themselves into a sacerdotal community, who sought to bring all classes and ranks, Turanians as well as Aryans, under the yoke of ecclesiastical or caste supremacy. The Kshatriyas, on the other hand, were eaters of flesh-meat and delighted in war and chase, and especially gloried in the exploits of their forefathers. The consequence was that they possessed a rich stock of traditions, which appear to have been handed down from generation to generation in the form of ballads. Thus the Kshatriyas appear as a fighting and conquering class, and originally exercised such influence over the masses as to be known as kings, whilst their god Indra was worshipped as the emblem of sovereignty. Ultimately, however, they appear to have degenerated into effeminate priest-ridden sovereigns and mercenary soldiers; and whilst such sovereigns served the Brahmans out of superstitious fear, the soldiers entered the service of the Vaisyas for the sake of pay.

Extent of the separation between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas in the Vedic age

The question of how far the two classes of Brahmans and Kshatriyas were really separated from each other in the Vedic times does not appear to be indicated in the *Rig-Veda;* but it may be inferred from the data which will appear hereafter. Originally, they probably grew up side by side, and their cause was identical, namely, the subjugation of the country. Indeed, it is by no means improbable that the duties of priests and warriors were originally fulfilled by one and the same individual, the father, the chieftain,

or the king. Gradually, however, the chieftains or kings may have found it convenient to engage priests, specially, for the performance of sacrifices and other rites and ceremonies; and at such a stage, a stage to which the original story of the *Mahabharata* appears to belong, the haughty Kshatriyas would look down with some disdain upon the mercenary or mendicant priests. But, in due course, the priests, as already indicated, formed themselves into a class, and exercised a vast and mysterious influence upon the masses ; and in later times of peace and luxury, they established a spiritual and caste ascendancy, which overshadowed and overawed the mightiest king of the Kshatriyas. Indeed, whilst the more ancient Kshatriyas seem to have regarded the Brahmans with much the same disdain as might have been exhibited by the half-converted warriors of the Dark Ages towards the wandering friars, no priest or confessor ever possessed a more powerful sway over kings or barons, than was exercised by the later Brahmans over the Hindu kings.

The original traditions and institutions which appear in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are undoubtedly of Kshatriya origin, and in their earliest form, were probably little more than ballads which were sung or chanted by bards and eulogists at the feasts and festivals of the Kshatriyas. Under such circumstances, the details may have been exaggerated by the old Kshatriya bards in order to glorify the ancient kings, and gratify the chieftains present by extravagant praises of their ancestors. Occasionally too, the bards seem to have introduced poetical embellishments and

artificial turns of a plot, which were more in accordance with a later and luxurious stage of civilisation, and also better calculated to awaken and keep alive the interest of large and mixed audiences. But the latest compilers of the *Mahabharata* were unquestionably Brahmans; and they appear to have resolutely and consistently falsified the Kshatriya traditions for the purpose of promulgating their own tenets of religion and morality; and especially, for asserting their own supremacy as a hereditary sacerdotal caste, invested with supernatural powers, and superior not only to the kings but to the very gods of the Kshatriyas. Ancient Brahman sages, under the name of Rishis, are abruptly and absurdly introduced in order to work miracles of the wildest and most senseless character, and to compel the reverence and obedience of such deities as Indra to Brahmanical authority. Moreover, acts which are contrary to morality and common decency are occasionally introduced for the depraved purpose of representing the more famous Brahmans as the direct progenitors of the more famous kings. Again, kings are described as paying reverence to Brahmans, amounting to worship, and rewarding them with extravagant profusion, probably as examples for later kings to follow. Fortunately, however, for the purposes of history, these interpolations can generally be detected by the supernatural character of the details, and may therefore be largely eliminated; excepting in those cases where the later fable has been so intertwined with the more authentic narrative that it is impossible to separate the one from the other without the danger of mutilating the original Kshatriya tradition.

The military community of the Aryans were known as Kshatriyas. They do not appear prominently under this name in the Vedic hymns; but they are the heroes of the epic legends, which have been preserved in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana.* They were less spiritual and refined than the Rishis, and their culture was more military and political. They were a proud, high-spirited race, imbued with a deep sense of personal honour, and ever ready to resent an affront or to espouse the cause of a kinsman or ally. Their pursuits, their pleasures, their religion, and their institutions were marked by all the characteristics which distinguish a military aristocracy from an agricultural but intellectual population, like that to which the Rishis belonged. From their childhood upwards, they were taught the art of war, which was more or less barbarous, according to their advance in civilisation. Thus in primitive times they were trained to fight with their fists, to wrestle with their feet and arms, to throw stones and to brandish clubs. At a later age, they learned to shoot with bows and arrows, to throw the quoit or chakra, to wield swords and spears, to tame horses and elephants, and to drive chariots. They frequently contended against each other or were engaged in wars against the non-Vedic people, whose country they invaded and occupied. In this fashion, they became warriors, hunters, and athletes, and besides practising the use of arms, they gambled with dice, or pursued romantic and often lawless amours. Their food was not the simple fare which the Rishis offered to their gods, but consisted of roasted horse and venison dried in the sun ; and instead of fattening on milk and butter, they revelled in fermented liquors, and possibly in strong wine.

Different religious ideas

The religion of the Kshatriyas furnishes significant illustrations of the effect of culture on theological beliefs. It was not so much inspired by the phenomena of external nature, which lead men to propitiate the spirits of fire, water, and the sky, as by the strong instincts of humanity, which lead men to adore heroes and heroines. The Kshatriyas worshipped the same gods as the Rishis, but endowed them with different attributes. The gods of the Rishis were poetical creations of the imagination; those of the Kshatriays were incarnations of manly strength and feminine beauty. Thus the Rishis invoked the Sun as the divine illuminator of the universe; but the Kshatriyas worshipped him as their own ancestral hero. The distinction is even more marked in the different conceptions of Indra, who was the great god of the Kshatriyas. The Rishis invoked Indra as the deity of the firmament, who marshalled the winds as his armies and battled against the clouds for the release of the welcome rains. To this day Indra is the god of the harvest throughout southern India, and is especially the deity of the great Pongul festival, which takes place around the month of January. This festival is one of the last relics of the old Vedic religion which still remains in India. It is at once a harvest time and Christmas time amongst the people of the peninsula; when families of joyous worshippers array themselves in new clothes, and propitiate the god Indra, and feast their respective households with new rice, boiled in new pots, mixed with milk,

sugar, butter and every other Hindu delicacy.[56] The Kshatriyas, on the other hand, worshipped Indra as a warrior of flesh and blood, the ruler of the universe, and sovereign of the gods. As a warrior he is represented as armed with the sword and chakra, the battle-axe and the thunderbolt, riding on an elephant with armed warriors around him. He was the protector of the fair-complexioned Vedic Aryans against the black-skinned non-Vedic people. He was also a type of sovereignty, a lord paramount in India; and a mythical conception has been preserved in the sacred writings of a succession of Indras reigning all over India at some ancient capital in the neighbourhood of Delhi. Even the name has survived in local traditions, and extensive areas in the neighbourhood of modern Delhi still bear the name of Indra-prastha, or the 'dominion of Indra'.[57] Again, as a deity, Indra appears as a sovereign ruler of the gods, reigning on high in an

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56. The Pongul festival has been admirably described by Gover in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society,* vol. V, new series. The most important feature of the ceremony is that of boiling rice and milk, which bears a remarkable resemblance to the old English tradition of boiling the Christmas pudding. A new earthen vessel is filled with the new rice, mingled artistically with milk, sugar, butter, and other Hindu dainties; and the boiling is then watched with the deepest interest, for the surging up of the milk is regarded as a favourable omen for all future harvests, and is hailed with shouts of rejoicing. Few young scholars have exhibited a deeper appreciation of this Hindu ritual, and a finer sympathy with the nature worship of Vedic times, than Gover; and his early death will be long lamented by all who are familiar with his writings.

57. Indraprastha was the original settlement of the Pandavas, as related in the *Mahabharata.*

Oriental heaven. He is seated on a throne with his beautiful wife Indrani by his side. Around him are all the gods and goddesses of the Vedic pantheon; whilst beautiful nymphs, named Apsaras, are ever dancing before him. This Kshatriya idea of Indra corresponds to the Homeric idea of Zeus, enthroned on high amongst the Olympian deities; and it is curious to note that the gods of the Kshatriyas, like the deities of Homer, are supposed to take a deep personal interest in the prosperity or adversity of the mortals, and are, moreover, endowed with human passions and desires.

Differences of worship

A still more striking distinction between the Rishis and the Kshatriyas is to be observed in their form of worship. The Rishis offered a portion of their daily food of grain and butter to the spirits of the earth, air, and blue ether. The Kshatriyas, on the other hand, feasted their gods with flesh-meat and strong wine. At these Kshatriya hecatombs, animals were slaughtered and cooked, and were consumed by the so-called worshippers during festivals. In ancient times, these feasts were public banquets of a political character, but more or less mixed up with the worship of the gods, who were supposed to share in the feast, and take an interest in the occasion. In a later and Brahmanical age, they were regarded as religious merits, and also as sacrifices for the atonement of sin. Amongst the most famous were the Rajasuya, or the royal feast, which was celebrated after the acquisition of a kingdom; and the Aswamedha or the imperial horse feast, by which a great

ruler was supposed to assert his sovereignty over inferior kings, who were obliged to attend such an occasion to acknowledge his supremacy and do him homage.

Marriage customs of the Rishis and the Kshatriyas

There was also a marked difference between the marriage ideas of the Rishis and those of the Kshatriyas. When a young Rishi desired to marry, he presented a pair or two of kine to the parents of the damsel, and then the nuptial rite was celebrated by her father.[58] But amongst the Kshatriyas, the marriage ceremony often involved the idea of capture. A young Kshatriya might obtain a wife by carrying away the daughter of another Kshatriya; but before doing so, the law required that he should have defeated her parents and kinsmen in open battle. Again, in primitive times, a maiden was often offered as a prize in an archery match; in other words, she was obtained by the superior prowess of the winner over all other competitors. But in heroic times, young men and maidens enjoyed a liberty which was unknown in a later and Brahmanical age; and thus the marriage union involved an expression of preference on the part of the bride, and became known as the Swayamvara, or 'self-choice' of the maiden. In the first instance, the damsel, who was offered as a prize in archery, was permitted to exercise the power of prohibiting any

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58. See *History of India,* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. ii, part v, 'Brahmanic Period', chap. viii.

objectionable candidate from entering the lists; and even after her hand was won, she was required to express her approbation by presenting the garland to the winner. In another, and apparently a later age, there was no competition in arms; and the damsel simply notified her choice in an assembly of Kshatriyas by throwing the garland round the neck of the favourite suitor. Ultimately, in the age of polygamy, when daughters were kept in greater seclusion, the damsel appears to have been guided in her choice by the advice of her father or her old nurse, who were present with her at the Swayamvara. But still the idea that the damsel had chosen her own husband was retained ; and thus it was sometimes the boast of a handsome and heroic king that he had been the chosen one in many Swayamvaras.[59]

This graceful institution has for centuries been driven out of India by later Brahmanical law under which the girl has no voice in the matter, but is betrothed by her parents before reaching the age of maturity. The form, however, or some trace of it, still lingers amongst the modern Rajputs. The royal maiden perhaps has no real preference, and is merely a puppet in the transaction; but a coconut is sent in her name to a selected king, and this ceremony is deemed equivalent to an offer of her hand. If the

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59. In the *Markendeya Purana,* there is a curious legend of a king named Avikshita who had been chosen by many ladies to be their husband.

coconut is accepted, the marriage rite is performed in due course; if it is refused, the affront can only be avenged by blood.[60]

Ideas of death and immortality

The contrast between the ideas of the Rishis and those of the Kshatriyas, as regards death and immortality, cannot be so clearly indicated. The later Rishis certainly believed in the existence of the soul after death, and in places of reward and punishment to which the soul would be adjudged, according to its merits or demerits. They also formed a dim conception of a deity named Yama, who was clothed with the attributes of a judge of the dead and resided in the infernal regions. But these ideas were more or less speculative and visionary, the creations of the imagination and sentiment, rather than the convictions of undoubting faith. The Kshatriyas, on the other hand, exulted in the belief in a material heaven; a heaven of all the Vedic gods, with Indra and Indrani as the supreme rulers, like Zeus and Hera; a heaven of

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60. A still more striking relic of this ancient institution is to be found in Burma. The people of Burma are Buddhists, and claim to be the descendants of the Indian Kshatriyas. Every marriageable damsel in a village places a lamp in her window during certain hours in the evening, whenever she is inclined to receive company; and the hours which custom devotes to such gatherings are universally known throughout Burma as courting time. The damsel takes her seat on a mat, and holds a kind of levee; whilst the young men array themselves in their smartest attire, and pay their visits to one or more lamp-lit houses as they feel disposed. At such social gatherings, mutual attachment generally springs up, and the marriage union is the legitimate result.

celestial nymphs, ambrosial nectar, and choice viands. In like manner, they believed in a hell or purgatory. But their ideas of the existence of the soul in the place of purgatory may be best gathered hereafter, from a description of their funeral ceremonies. The body was burnt, and the place of burning was some gloomy locality on the bank of a river which was supposed to be haunted by ghosts. Rice and meat, as well as butter and oil, were placed upon the pile. After the burning, the mourners sprinkled water and presented cakes for the refreshment of the dead man; and on certain appointed days, the ghost of the deceased was propitiated, in like manner, by similar offerings to his shade, in the same way that Electra poured out libations on the burning-place of Agamemnon. These feasts in honour of the dead were termed Sraddhas, and are still celebrated throughout India in honour of the Pitris or ancestors.[61]

Absence of Sati, or widow burning

It is somewhat remarkable that in the ancient Vedic rite of cremation, there is no authentic appearance of Sati, or the sacrifice of the living wife or concubine in the burning-place of the dead man in order that the female might accompany his spirit to the world of shades. It would therefore appear that the propitiation

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61. It is a curious proof of the intermingling of the Aryans and the Turanians that traces of this religious worship are to be found amongst both the Rajputs and the so-called Turanians of the remote south. In later and Brahmanical times, the rite involved not merely an offering of cakes and water to the ghosts of the deceased ancestors, but a great feast to the Brahmans.

of ghosts led to no such horrible sacrifices amongst the Vedic Aryans any more than amongst the Greeks.[62] The mourners offered cakes and water in the simple belief that the spirits of the departed heroes were conscious of such pious attentions; and to this day, such a faith still lingers to soften and humanise the world.

The history of ancient India, under the Kshatriyas, had fallen into a state of chaos. Persian traditions, which are still accepted by educated Moslems, refer to the old city and kingdom of Ayodhya, or Oudh, and represent Krishna, the sovereign of Ayodhya, as the first king of India, and the first of a long line of ancient kings. Other traditions refer to the ancient Persian invasions of India, and thus seem to indicate that the stream of Aryan culture was flowing into India from time immemorial. Others, again, refer to wars between the ruler of Ayodhya and the Dravidian people of the peninsula from which it would appear that the civilisation of the Dravidian populations of southern India was already in advance of that which prevailed in northern India.[63]

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62. It will be seen hereafter that the burning of the widow with the dead body of her husband was of Rajput origin.

63. The Persian traditions of the old Hindu empire of Ayodhya are too extravagant to be exhibited in detail, although they may be accepted as indications of the general character of the prehistoric period. The invasions of Rostum and Afrasiab may be regarded as representing ancient Persian and Turki invasions, although they can scarcely be treated as literal facts. Again, there is a legend that a chieftain of Cooch-

Two other sets of traditions have been preserved in the two Hindu epics, known as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana.* Those in the *Mahabharata* are grouped round the city of Delhi, anciently called Indraprastha; and are connected with a very ancient struggle known as the great war of *Mahabharata.* Those in the *Ramayana* are grouped around the city of Ayodhya, which was the capital of a kingdom known as Kosala; and are connected with another isolated event, which is known as the exile of Rama.

The story of the great war of *Mahabharata* refers to an early period of Vedic Aryan colonisation, when the Kshatriyas had only recently crossed the river Saraswati into northern India, and formed rural settlements at Hastinapur and Delhi on the upper streams of the Ganges and the Jamuna. The story of the exile of Rama belongs to a much later period, when the Vedic Aryans had advanced down the valleys of the Ganges and the Jamuna to

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Bihar subdued Bengal and Behar proper, and founded the ancient capital of Luknowti, or Gour; and this story may refer to some ancient revolution; though practically it is obsolete and devoid of significance. Compare Ferishta's *Mussulman History,* translated by Briggs, vol. i, Introductory chapter on the Hindus.

One tradition has been preserved by Ferishta, which may possibly relate to a real religious movement. He mentions a certain Hindu sovereign who reigned over the whole of northern and eastern India, and who was persuaded by a Brahman to set up idols. Previously the Hindus are said to have worshipped the Sun and the Stars like the ancient Persians.

Ferishta also mentions that musicians, and the science of music, were originally introduced into northern India from the Dravidian kingdom of Telinga, the modern Telugu country.

the centre of northern India, and established the great city of Ayodhya as the metropolis of the empire of Kosala. There is thus a marked difference between the rude colonists of Hastinapur and Delhi, and the more polished inhabitants of the city and court of Ayodhya ; and this difference will be readily understood by reference to the traditions of the two royal houses.

Main tradition of the *Mahabharata*

The main tradition of the *Mahabharata* has been amplified by the Brahmanical compilers into a huge unwieldy epic. It will only be necessary, in the present place, to bring such incidents and characters under review as will serve to illustrate the life and usages which find expression in the poem. These may be considered under five heads, namely:

(i) The domestic life of the ancient kings at Hastinapur.

(ii) The family rivalry between two branches of the family, known as the Kauravas and Pandavas, which led to the migration of the latter.

(iii) The marriage of the Pandavas and the colonisation of Indraprastha.

(iv) The quarrel between the rival branches at a gambling-match, which led to the ruin and exile of the Pandavas.

(v) The war of extermination, which culminated in the slaughter of the Kauravas, and the final triumph of the Pandavas.

The old domestic life at Hastinapur may be easily realised if the probable surroundings are first taken into consideration. A large village seems to have been constructed of mud and bamboos on the banks of the upper stream of the Ganges. This was known as the city of Hastinapur. It was probably inhabited by the cultivators of the neighbouring lands, and all the dependants and retainers of the colony; whilst the king, with his family and immediate kinsmen, dwelt in a so-called palace or fort which was most likely built in a rude square, with a council-hall and inner quadrangle after the fashion of Hindu forts. The Aryan colony at Hastinapur was not, however, without its neighbours. Amongst others was a Naga people, who dwelt in cities, and had perhaps attained a certain stage of civilisation. Moreover, some tribes of mountaineers dwelt in the neighbourhood who were known as Bhils, who possessed no culture at all; they had a trusting faith in the power of the Vedic Aryans, but were nevertheless kept under strict subjection.

An aged king named Santanu dwelt in this fort, and had a son living with him who had attained manhood. Like many other aged kings, he desired to marry a certain young damsel but her parents refused to unite her to the old man, as he had a son already living to inherit the kingdom; urging that if the damsel bore any sons to the king, they would ultimately become the mere servants or dependants of his successor. At this juncture, the son came forward and sacrificed himself for the sake of his father. He took a solemn vow that he would never inherit the

kingdom, nor marry a wife, nor become a father. All chance of contention was thus removed. The damsel married the old king with the assurance that if she bore a son, he would inherit the kingdom. Meanwhile, the son was respected as a model of filial piety; but his self-sacrifice was regarded with so much horror by the Hindus, that henceforth he was known s Bhishma, or 'the dreadful', because of his dreadful vow.

Marriage by capture

King Santanu became the father of a son by his young wife and then died. Bhishma, who was henceforth the faithful patriarch of the family, placed the infant son upon the throne, and trained him in the use of arms and all the accomplishments of the Kshatriyas. When the boy was old enough to be married, Bhishma carried off the two daughters of a neighbouring king, according to the law of capture, and gave them as wives to his younger half-brother.[64] But scarcely was the young prince married, when he sickened and died, leaving no children, and no prospect that one would be born to him after his demise. Under such circumstances, it was the custom amongst the ancient Kshatriyas, as it was amongst the ancient Hebrews, that the nearest kinsmen should take the widows, and raise up the sons and heirs of the deceased. It originated in the intense desire to prevent a landed inheritance

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64. This law of capture, as already stated, required that a warrior should completely defeat and subdue the parents and kinsmen of a damsel before he attempted to carry her away.

from going out of the family. Bhishma could not interfere because of his vow; but another kinsman, named Vyasa, ultimately became the father of a son by each of the widows. These two sons subsequently became the fathers of the men who fought in the great war of *Mahabharata*. The eldest was a blind man, named Dhritarashtra; and he became the father of the Kauravas. The younger was a white-complexioned man, named Pandu; and he became the father of the Pandavas.

Pandu and Dhritarashtra—kinsmen and dependants

While Dhritarashtra and Pandu were still young men, Bhishma trained them as carefully as he had trained his half-brother ; but it became a question as to which of them ought to succeed to the throne. So a council of all the kinsmen and retainers was held, and the matter was discussed by all present; and it was decided that as Dhritarashtra was blind, he could not be accepted as king; and consequently, the younger brother Pandu was placed upon the throne. But Pandu did not care to rule as the king. Accordingly, he left the kingdom in charge of Dhritarastra, and went out into the jungle and spent his days in hunting; and after a while he died in the jungle, leaving a widow named Kunti, and five sons, who were known as the Pandavas.

Meantime, Dhritarashtra governed the kingdom in spite of his blindness. He had married a wife named Gandhari, and became the father of several sons known as the Kauravas. Accordingly, when Pandu died in the jungle, the five Pandavas

returned to the old fort at Hastinapur with their mother Kunti and took up their abode with their uncle Dhritarashtra and their cousins, the Kauravas. Bhishma was now too old to undertake the training of a third generation. A skilled warrior, named Drona, was entertained for the purpose, and married to a kinswoman of the family. Drona thus became the preceptor of both the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and trained them in the use of every kind of weapon, as well as in the art of taming lions and elephants, and in the knowledge of the stars. But a rivalry sprung up between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, which broke out on all occasions, and especially during the martial exercises ; and it was soon evident that the Kauravas and the Pandavas could not continue to dwell together much longer in the old ancestral home.

Individual character of heroes and heroines

Before proceeding further with the story, it may be useful to realise the several characters who have been brought upon the stage. The blind king Dhritarashtra was a man without any force of character, whose chief object was to keep things pleasant, and prevent any open breach between his sons and nephews. When his wife Gandhari heard that she was to be married to a blind husband, she bound up her eyes with a handkerchief so that she might not possess any advantage over him. Her sons were collectively named the Kauravas, but their exact number is uncertain, and it will suffice to mention Duryodhana, the eldest, and his brother Duhsasana. Duryodhana was a brave and skilful warrior, but bitterly jealous and easily mortified. Duhsasana was

a more taunting and spiteful character, and drove his enemies nearly frantic by his insolence and revilement. The Pandu family comprised the widow Kunti, who was generally kept in the background; and the five Pandavas, of whom only three require special mention, namely: Yudhishthira, the eldest, who was renowned for his patience and self-command; Bhima, the second, who was a giant in strength, but stupid and barbarous; and Arjuna, the third brother, who was famous for his skill in archery, and regarded as a young and gallant hero.

The old members of the family were Bhishma the patriarch, and Drona the preceptor. A young warrior, named Karna, the son of a charioteer, was maintained in the household as a sworn friend of Duryodhana and the Kauravas; and although his birth was doubtful, he was well-skilled in the use of arms, and proved a loyal and faithful adherent of the Kauravas to the last. There was also a kinsman named Sakuni who was uncle to the Kauravas, being the brother of their mother Gandhari. He was, however, a notorious gambler, and skilled in the use of loaded dice; and, in other ways, was an evil genius of the family.

Migration of the Pandavas to old Delhi

The breach between the sons of Dhritarashtra and the sons of Pandu soon widened into an open quarrel. At one time when Bhima was stupefied with liquor, he was thrown into the Ganges by Duryodhana, and was only saved from drowning by the interposition of some Nagas, which led to his residing for a while in the city of the Nagas. Again, at a mock combat during a public

exhibition of arms, Bhima and Duryodhana lost their tempers and engaged in a real fight which might have resulted in bloodshed, but for the prompt interference of Drona. On the same occasion, a fierce dispute broke out between Karna and Arjuna. Karna challenged Arjuna to a combat, but Arjuna declined because the challenger was only the son of a charioteer. Then Duryodhana is said to have made Karna a king; an ancient ceremony which amounted to Hindu kinghthood. This led to more dissension, but the approach of night stopped the tumult. At a later date, Duryodhana and Yudhishthira put forth rival claims to the post of Yuvaraja, which conferred the right of succession to the kingdom. The blind King Dhritarashtra tried to temporise, but at length appointed his own son Duryodhana to the post; and Yudhishthira and his brethren left Hastinapur with the view of establishing a new colony, about sixty miles off on the bank of the Jamuna, at a spot which was then covered with a jungle, but which was subsequently occupied by the old city of Delhi or Indraprastha.

Swayamvara of Draupadi

The colonisation of Indraprastha by the Pandavas is a significant event in the Vedic Aryan tradition. The Kauravas seem to have been already married, although the fact is not very explicitly related in the poem. The Pandavas determined on getting married before clearing the land for their new colony. They heard that a neighbouring king was about to celebrate a Swayamvara

for the marriage of his daughter Draupadi. Accordingly, they proceeded to the neighbourhood and found a crowd of suitors dwelling under primitive huts, and supplied with daily provisions by the giver of the Swayamvara. The delicate question of marriage was to be settled by an archery match. On the appointed day, the Pandavas made their appearance on the ground; but in order to keep themselves concealed, they disguised themselves as Brahmans. The story of the simple ceremony which followed is valuable from its general accordance with old traditions. The brother of Draupadi placed the nuptial garland in her hand, and led her into the arena and proclaimed to all present that she would be given in marriage to the fortunate archer who succeeded in striking a particular mark, which is said to have been an artificial fish, twirling around on top of a pole. Many aspiring youths assayed the feat, but failed. The ambitious Karna entered the lists, but was not allowed to shoot, as the damsel declared that she would not marry a man of such mean birth. Finally, Arjuna stepped forward, drew his bow and struck the fish; and Draupadi, pleased with his appearance, threw the garland round his neck, and permitted him to lead her away.

Inferior status of the Brahmans

A strange tumult then arose amongst the suitors. Arjuna was disguised as a Brahman; and it was not only surprising that a Brahman should have hit the mark, but contrary to all precedent that a Brahman should have dared to enter the lists, and compete for the hand of a daughter of a king. But in due course, the whole matter was explained; and when the birth and lineage of

the Pandavas were set forth, the marriage was admitted to be in every way suitable. One blot remains upon the story, over which it is necessary to draw a veil. According to a usage, which prevailed in the early colonial life of the Vedic Aryans, the damsel became the wife, not of Arjuna alone, but of all the five brothers.

Rajasuya, or the royal feast

For a brief period, the narrative runs on smoothly. The colonisation of Indraprastha was effected by firing the jungle and driving out the Naga inhabitants. A romantic episode is introduced to the effect that Arjuna left his home for a year, and during that period married a Naga lady; but the incident is only valuable as illustrating the early relations between the Vedic Aryans and the surrounding Nagas. When the settlement had been established, the Pandavas celebrated a great flesh sacrifice, known as the Rajasuya or royal sacrifice, by which they asserted their right to the land. This feast was attended by many neighbouring kings, and amongst others by their cousins, the Kauravas. The Rajasuya was regarded as a success and triumph; and it consequently re-awakened the old jealousy of the Kauravas. Accordingly, Duryodhana plotted with his brethren to humiliate the pride of the Pandavas by depriving them of their wife and land.

Passion of the Kshatriyas for gambling

Here, it may be remarked that gambling was not only a vice but a passion with the ancient Kshatriyas. Stories of men who have lost their lands, their wealth, and even their wives by gambling are to be found in old Hindu traditions. Duryodhana,

and his brother Duhsasana, consulted their uncle Sakuni as to how they might inveigle Yudhishthira into a game in which he would be certain to lose. Ultimately, it was agreed to challenge the Pandavas to a gambling match at Hastinapur; and then Duryodhana was to lay down the stakes, whilst Sakuni played the game on his behalf. The plot was carried out. The Pandavas accepted the challenge, and appeared with their wife Draupadi at Hastinapur, where they were received with every demonstration of kindness and hospitality. A tent for the game was set up hard by; and there the memorable game was played between Yudhishthira and Sakuni whilst Drona and Bhishma, and indeed the Kauravas and the other Pandavas as well, took no part in the gambling, and were merely lookers-on.

The incidents of this gambling match have been familiar to every educated Hindu throughout the Indian continent for unrecorded centuries. Sakuni is accused of having used loaded dice, and thus to have won every game unfairly. The infatuation of Yudhisthira forms an equally important feature in the ancient story. He lost all the cattle, possessions, and lands at Indraprastha belonging to himself and his brethren. Next he staked his brethren, one after the other, and lost them. Next he staked himself, and still he continued to lose. Finally, he was induced to stake Draupadi and this important throw, like all the others, was won by Sakuni. Thus the Pandavas were stripped of all their property; and they and their wife Draupadi were reduced to the condition of slaves to the Kauravas, by the folly and madness of their elder brother, whose authority they had not ventured to set aside.

At this catastrophe, a strange point of law was raised, which proves that such reckless gambling matches were by no means infrequent in ancient times. A messenger was sent to bring Draupadi into the tent, and to inform her that Yudhisthira had gambled her away, and that she had thus become a slave-girl to the Kauravas. When, however, she heard what had transpired, she insisted upon knowing whether Yudhishthira had not made himself a slave before he had wagered her, and thus lost the power to gamble away the liberty of a free woman. No one, however, vouchsafed a reply. A scene followed in the gambling-tent which must be left to the imagination. Duryodhana and Duhsasana insulted Draupadi by affecting to treat her as a slave-girl; and Bhima and his younger brethren were maddened by the sight. Yudhisthira hung down his head in shame, but made no movement; and his brothers could not act without the consent of the elder. Meantime, Bhishma, the patriarch, and Drona, the preceptor, could only look on with silent horror. At last the dreadful information was carried to the blind king Dhritarashtra. He at once ordered himself to be led to the gambling-tent, and then commanded that Draupadi should be restored to her husbands. But the Pandavas were deprived of all their lands and possessions, and compelled to go out into the jungle for a period of twelve years, and to subsist, as they best could, on fruits and game.[65] The Pandavas obeyed the Raja without demur; but as

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65. There was a thirteenth year of exile, but the incident is apparently modern. See *History of India,* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. i, 'Mahabharata'.

they left the old palace, Bhima loudly swore that a day should come when he would break the thigh of Duryodhana and drink the blood of Duhsasana.

War of the *Mahabharata*

The adventures of the Pandavas during their exile throw but little authentic light upon the prevailing state of life and manners. It will suffice to say that after the prescribed period, they opened up negotiations with the Kauravas for the recovery of their lands; and it is curious to note that these negotiations were never carried on in writing, but only by word of mouth through messengers, envoys, or heralds. At last, war commenced in a savage but natural fashion. The allies on either side were marshalled upon the famous plain of Kurukshetra,[66] amidst the deafening noise of drums and shells. Then the rival warriors insulted and abused each other, until at last they fell like madmen. The battles were little more than single combats, in which infuriated savages fought with fists and clubs, or kicked and wrestled with their legs and arms, or shot arrows, threw stones, or hacked and hewed with swords and axes, cutting off the head of every enemy that fell. Bhishma was slain in a single combat with Arjuna. Drona was slain by the

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66. The plain of Kurukshetra is identified with that of Panipat. It lies to the north-west of Delhi, and has been the most famous battle-field in India from time immemorial. It was here that Baber fought the great battle in 1525, which virtually established the Moghul dynasty at Delhi; and it was here that Ahmed Shah, the Afghan, inflicted such a crushing blow upon the Marathas in 1761, as practically cleared the way for the establishment of Great Britain as the paramount power.

brother of Draupadi. Bhima succeeded in defeating Duhsasana, and fulfilled his vow by decapitating him on the field of battle, and drinking his blood with savage shouts of exultation. At last there was a decisive combat between Arjuna and Karna, in which Karna was slain. The Kauravas now lost heart. The few survivors fled from the field, excepting Duryodhana who endeavoured to conceal himself in a marshy glen. But the Pandavas felt that so long as their chief enemy was alive, the war might be renewed. Accordingly, Duryodhana was routed out of his concealment and compelled to engage in a final combat with Bhima. At length, after a deadly struggle, Bhima is said to have struck a foul blow, which broke the thigh of his adversary in fulfilment of his vow. Duryodhana was left mortally wounded upon the field, and died the next day.

Thus ended the great war of *Mahabharata*. An incident of a night attack on the camp of the Pandavas is related, but the story is simply horrible, and merely illustrates the blind madness for revenge which characterised all the combatants. The Pandavas proceeded in triumph to their old home at Hastinapur, and took possession of the entire kingdom. After this they conquered all other kings round about and celebrated the horse sacrifice, known as the Aswamedha, by which they asserted their sovereignty. Meantime, the blind Dhritarashtra and his wife Gandhari retired to a hermitage on the banks of the Ganges, where they ultimately perished miserably in a conflagration of the jungle.

Main tradition of the *Ramayana*

The main tradition of the *Ramayana* appears under very different aspects than that of the *Mahabharata,* and the

surroundings are of a more luxurious character. Instead of a colonial settlement, like those at Hastinapur and Indraprastha, there was the great imperial city of Ayodhya, the capital of a substantive empire, situated on the river Sarayu, the modern Gogra, with strong walls, gates, and a garrison of archers. Instead of a rude fort, there was a magnificent palace, an extensive inner-apartment for the royal ladies, and all the paraphernalia of sovereignty. The king was not a mere feudal chieftain surrounded by retainers, but the monarch of an empire, with ministers of state and a council of nobles. Finally, the exile of Rama was not brought about by a quarrel between rival kinsmen, but by intrigues between two jealous and unscrupulous queens.

It will be necessary to bring together such incidents as will indicate the state of civilisation; and these may be considered under four heads, namely:

(i) The domestic life of the royal family at Ayodhya.

(ii) The intrigues of the first queen, and the favourite queen, respecting the appointment of the heir-apparent.

(iii) The exile of Rama.

(iv) The death of the king and the triumphant return of Rama.[67]

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67. See Wheeler's *History of India,* vol. ii, part iv, 'Ramayana'—The 'Ramayana' also narrates an important event, known as the war between Rama and the Rakshasas, on account of the abduction of Rama's wife by Ravana, the demon Raja of Lanka or Ceylon. This event, however, seems to have no real connection with the tradition of the exile. It appears to be connected with the life of another Rama, who was distinguished as the Rama of the Dekhan. It will be brought under review in chapter vii, which deals with the history of the Brahmanical revival.

Royal family at Ayodhya or Oudh

Maharaja Dasaratha was the sovereign of the empire of Kosala, in the centre of northern India; and a descendant of the Suryavansa, or children of the Sun. The city of Ayodhya was the metropolis; and here he dwelt in his palace with all the pride and pomp of royalty. He had three queens by whom he had four sons. The first and oldest queen was named Kausalya, and she was the mother of Rama. The youngest and favourite queen was named Kaikeyi, and she was the mother of Bharata. There was also a third queen who had two sons, but they played such unimportant parts in the story that their names may be passed over in silence.

Marriage of Rama and Sita

Rama, the eldest son of the king, was married to a princess named Sita. She was the daughter of Janaka, the ruler of the neighbouring kingdom of Mithila, which seems to have generally corresponded to the modern country of Tirhut. The story of the marriage is a curious relic of old Hindu life. Rama paid a visit to Mithila at an early age and found that Sita was to be given in marriage to the hero who first succeeded in bending a certain enormous bow. Many young men had tried to accomplish this feat, but all had failed. Rama, however, bent the bow with ease, and thus obtained his beautiful bride. The marriage rites were performed by King Janaka. The sacred fire was burning on the altar, and Rama was conducted to it by a procession of friends

and kinsmen, and stood at the north-east corner of the altar. Janaka then brought his daughter and placed her by the side of the bridegroom; and Rama took her by the hand in the presence of the fire-deity, and accepted her as his wife. The pair was sprinkled with water which had been consecrated by the utterance of Vedic hymns; and then walked three times round the altar, whilst the trumpets were sounded to announce that the marriage was over.[68]

Shortly after the marriage of Rama, a question of considerable importance was agitated at the court of Ayodhya, namely, the appointment of an heir-apparent to the throne under the title of Yuvaraja. According to Hindu usages, the heir-apparent was installed as Yuvaraja, whilst the king was still living, in order that he might relieve the sovereign of the heavier duties of administration, and prepare himself for the important position which he would have to fulfil when he succeedd to the throne.

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68. It is impossible to avoid noticing the striking resemblance between the ancient marriage ceremony, as it was performed by our Aryan forefathers in their private dwellings, and the more modern rites as it is performed in Christian churches. In Protestant countries, the fire on the altar has been rejected as Jewish; it belongs rather to the old Aryan fire-worship. Again, the use of holy water has been abandoned, although it is nothing more than an old rite of purification. But in all essential particulars, the ceremony is the same. The bridegroom and the bride are still placed before the altar; and the father of the bride gives away his daughter; whilst the bridegroom takes her hand in his, and pledges his troth in the presence of the altar, although the fire is wanting.—*History of India*, by Talboys Wheeler, vol. ii, 'Ramayana', ch. v.

But Dasaratha, like many other sovereigns, was disinclined to resign any share of his power and dignity to a son and successor; and possibly he feared that the appointment would lead to a bitter and jealous dispute in his own household. He was, however, compelled to yield to popular will. A deputation of ministers and chieftains waited upon him to express the general desire that he should retire from the more acitve duties of administration, and entrust the power to his eldest son Rama. Accordingly, the king summoned a great council of chieftains and people and publicly announced his intention of appointing Rama as Yuvaraja; and it was decided that on the following day the prince should be solemnly inaugurated upon the throne with all the ancient ceremonial.

Whilst these proceedings were transpiring before the public eye, intrigues were already in progress within the palace walls. Kausalya, the first queen, was naturally deeply interested in the movement which would secure the succession to her son Rama; and there seems no question that Rama, as the eldest son, had the strongest claim to be the Yuvaraja. But Kaikeyi, the youngest queen, had long maintained an extraodinary influence on the aged ruler by reason of her youth and beauty, and it was feared that she would cajole the old sovereign into nominating her own son Bharata. Accordingly, the whole business had been kept a profound secret from Kaikeyi. She had even been induced to allow her son Bharata to pay a visit to her own father, without suspecting that the only object was to get him out of the city until Rama had been installed; and consequently only exulted with all a mother's pride in the expected meeting between her son and her father.

The great council was over, and preparations were on foot for the inauguration. Kaikeyi was unconsiously sitting in her own apartment, expecting a visit from her royal husband. Meantime, her old nurse happened to ascend the roof of the palace, and there beheld the blaze of illuminations and general rejoicings; and at the same time was told that on the following morning Rama was to be enthroned as the future king of Ayodhya. The woman had been too long familiar with intrigues so as not to perceive at once that her mistress had been outwitted by the first queen ; that Kausalya had procured the absence of Bharata in order to secure the installation of her own son Rama. She accordingly carried the terrible news to Kaikeyi, and threw the favourite beauty into a vindictive fury. Kaikeyi threw off all her jewels and ornaments, and scattered them over the floor. She then untied her long black hair, and dishevelled it over her shoulders, and cast herself upon the ground, and poured out a flood of tears.

The king succumbs to the favourite

Meantime, the old king, knowing that he had difficult news to communicate to his young and favourite wife, proceeded to her apartments in the vain hope of reconciling her to the appointment of Rama. But when he saw her weeping and fainting upon the floor, he felt that he was powerless. She was deaf to all entreaties and explanations; and when he began to moan and wail, she was heedless to all his affliction.

Only one thing would content her, namely, that Rama should be banished to the jungle, and that her own son Bharata be

appointed the Yuvaraja. She cared not for the long-established custom of the family, nor for the remonstrances of the great council, nor for the disappointment of the people in general. Rama was to be exiled, and Bharata was to be installed. The result can be anticipated. Dasaratha was threatened and caressed by turns until at last he yielded to the strong will and blandishments of the imperious beauty, and engaged that Rama should be banished from the realm, and that Bharata should be enthroned in his room.

Rama's exile

Next morning there was a scene. The city had been kept awake throughout the night by the joyful preparations for the installation of Rama, whilst the country people had been pouring in from all the villages round about to witness the imposing ceremony. Meantime, Dasaratha regretted having promised the previous night, and would gladly have escaped from its fulfilment; but Kaikeyi held him to her purpose, like a tigress caring only for her young. Rama was summoned to the palace, but instead of hearing that he was appointed as Yuvaraja, he was coldly told by Kaikeyi that he was to go into exile for fourteen years, and that Bharata was to fill the post. Rama, however, bore the sudden and astounding news with all the self-repression at his command. He betrayed neither grief nor disappointment, but only professed his desire to obey the will of his father. He then carried the dreadful tidings to his mother Kausalya, who was almost broken-hearted with the shock. She had expected that her son would have ultimately become the ruler of the kingdom. But the one

hope of her life was shattered. Her beloved son was to be separated from her, probably for ever, and she had nothing before her but a joyless existence exposed to the taunts and triumphs of her younger rival. In her first exasperation, she declared that her royal husband had lost his senses; and she implored Rama to take the initiative and place him in confinement, and assume the royal power. But Rama refused to commit such an act of disobedience and disloyalty. He returned to his own house, and informed his wife Sita of all that had occurred; and the young wife, as was only natural, received the intelligence in a widely different spirit from Kausalya. She cared for no hardships and no privations, provided only that she might accompany her husband into the jungle; and Rama was at last induced to permit her to share his banishment. Lakshmana, a brother of Rama, was also allowed to accompany the exiles.

The narrative of the banishment would seem to imply that such catastrophes were by no means infrequent in ancient times. The royal charioteer was ordered to drive the exiles to the frontier; and there they were well-entertained by a chieftain of the Bhils, named Guha, who seems to have been in friendly alliance with Kosala. The charioteer then returned to Ayodhya, whilst the exiles crossed the river Ganges to the southern bank. During the passage, Sita offered a prayer to the river goddess for the safe return of her husband at the termination of his banishment ; and she made a vow that if her prayers were answered, she would present the goddess

with large offerings. The exiles next proceeded to the hermitages of the Brahmans at Prayaga; the holy spot where the Ganges and the Jamuna form a junction. From Prayaga, they crossed the Jamuna, and Sita repeated to the goddess of that river the prayers and vows which she had already offered to the Ganges. Finally, they took up their abode on the hill Chitra-kuta in Bundelkhand, where they dwelt for many days in a hut constructed of trees and leaves.

Death of Dasaratha

Before Rama reached Chitra-kuta, his aged father Dasaratha had expired from grief in his palace at Ayodhya. The event is related with many striking incidents illustrative of the ancient Hindu civilisation. It transpired in the apartments of the first queen Kausalya. At midnight the old ruler found that his soul was departing to the abode of Death; and he gave up his last breath with a longing cry for his exiled son. The queen was so affected by the shock that she fell into a deep swoon which continued throughout the night. Early morning dawned, and the ordinary life of the palace commenced as usual. The servants, male and female, were bringing in water and perfumes, as well as the early morning refreshments. Bards and eulogists, according to the custom, were singing the praises of their ruler. The appearance of the sovereign was expected every moment, for no one was conscious of the calamity that had occurred. At last the royal ladies proceeded to awaken the king, and then they found

that he was dead in the chamber of Kausalya. At once the palace resounded with their lamentations. The fatal news spread throughout the royal household that the sovereign was no more. The utmost confusion and excitement broke up the calm of early morning. The minsters of state hurried to the chamber and confirmed the fatal tidings. Maharaja Dasaratha had breathed his last.

The circumstances which followed furnish a glimpse of the political life in the old empire of Kosala. Neither of the sons of the deceased king was present at Ayodhya. Bharata had gone to the city of his grandfather, accompanied by one of his brothers ; and Rama had gone into exile with the remaining brother. Consequently, it was necessary to defer the funeral ceremony until it could be conducted by the son who was to succeed to the throne. For this purpose, the remains of the dead king were placed for preservation in a large cualdron of oil. The council was assembled on the following day, and the nomination of the deceased king was accepted. The exile of Rama disqualified him from succeeding to the throne; and messengers were sent to bring Bharata to Ayodhya with all speed.

Funeral rites for the king

Bharata hastened to the capital, but on his arrival he is said to have refused to ascend the throne to the exclusion of his elder brother. Before this point could be settled, it was necessary that he should superintend the burning of the royal remains, and perform the thirteen days of mourning. The dead body of the

king was placed upon a litter, and covered with garlands, and sprinkled with incense. The funeral procession then moved slowly along to the place of burning. First walked the bards and eulogists, chanting the praises of the departed ruler in melancholy strains. Next appeared the royal widows on foot, with their long black hair dishevelled over their shoulders, shrieking and screaming as they moved along. Next came the royal litter borne by the servants of the dead king, with the sacred fire ever burning, whilst the insignia of royalty were held over the royal corpse—the white umbrella of sovereignty, and the jewelled hand-fans of hair waving to and fro. Bharata and his brother walked close behind, weeping bitterly, and holding on to the litter with their hands. Other servants followed in chariots, and distributed funeral gifts amongst the surrounding multitude. The place of burning was a desolate spot on the bank of the river Sarayu. There the funeral pile was prepared, and the dead body of the king was reverently placed thereon; and animals were sacrificed, and their flesh placed upon the pile, together with boiled rice, oil, and ghee. Bharata and his brother then poured out libations of water to refresh the soul of their departed father ; and the mourners returned to the gloomy city. For ten days Bharata lamented for his father on a mat of Kusa grass. On the tenth day, he purified himself. On the twelfth day, he performed the Sraddha, or offering of cakes and other food to the soul of his father. On the thirteenth day he returned to the place of burning, accompanied by his brother, and threw all the remains of the deceased sovereign into the river; and thus the funeral rites of Maharaja Dasaratha were brought to a close.

Closing scenes and return of Rama

According to the *Ramayana,* Bharata subsequently undertook a journey into the jungle in order to offer the kingdom to his elder brother Rama; and the interview between the two brothers on the hill of Chitra-kuta is described at considerable length. But the incidents, although interesting in themselves, are somewhat apocryphal, and throw no light upon ancient manners and usages.[69] Rama is said to have refused the kingdom; and Bharata returned to Ayodhya to rule the empire of Kosala in the name of his elder brother. At this point the original tradition of the exile of Rama seems to have terminated; and it will suffice to add that at the expiration of the fourteen years of banishment, Rama returned to Ayodhya with his wife and brother, and was solemnly installed on the throne of Kosala by the faithful and loyal Bharata.[70]

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69. The details will be found in *History of India* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. ii, part iv, 'Ramayana', chap. xiii, xiv, etc.

70. The original tradition of the exile of Rama is to be found in the Buddhist chronicles, and is exhibited at length in chapter iii, on the life and teachings of Goutama Buddha.

But the 'Ramayana' contains an account of the exile, which belongs to a much later period, and cannot apparently have any connection with the earlier tradition. According to this later story, Rama spent thirteen years of his exile in wandering with his wife and brother from one Brahmanical hermitage to another, in the country between the river Ganges and the river Godaveri. These journeys extended from the hill Chitra-kuta in Bundelhand to the modern town of Nasik, near the sources of the Godaveri, about seventy-five miles to the north-west of the modern town of Bombay. The hermitages are said to have been occupied by the old Rishis

The broad distinction between the life of the ancient Rishis and that of the ancient Kshatriyas has already been pointed out. There was an equally wide difference in their respective destinies. The Vedic Rishis, who chanted hymns and offered sacrifice on the banks of the rivers of the Punjab, have left no relic of their existence beyond the picture of domestic and religious life which is reflected in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*. For thousands of years, they may have cultivated their fields, and grazed their cattle and horses, whilst developing a religious culture which was to revoulutionise the old primitive worship of India. But for ages the Rishis have disappeared from the religious life of India; and their strains of natural peity have died out of the land like a poet's dream.

The Kshatriayas were men of a far different calibre. They were the conquerors of northern India, and they must have possessed a history; and though the annals of the conquest were

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who composed the Vedic hymns, and who are represented as Brahmans, although they must have flourished ages before the appearance of the Brahmans. The whole narrative may therefore be dismissed as apocryphal; as a mythical invention of a comparatively modern date, intended as an introduction to the tradition of another and later Rama, who may be distinguished as the Rama of the Dekhan. This Rama of the Dekhan is represented to have carried on a great religious war against a Raja named Ravana, who was the sovereign of the island of Ceylon, the anciently known as Lanka. Ravana and his subjects are termed Rakshasas or demons; but there is reason to believe that they represent the Buddhists; and if so, the war could not have been carried on during the Vedic period, but during the Brahmanical revival, which seems to have commenced between the sixth and eighth centuries of the Christian era, and to have continued until our own time.

not perhaps written in books, they were doubtless preserved for centuries as songs or ballads in the memory of the bards. But during a later age of Brahmanical revival, they were lost in religious revolution, or converted into vehicles or parables for Brahmanical teaching. Every element of historical value was eliminated. Genealogies were fabricated by unscrupulous Brahmans for the purpose of tracing the descent of existing royal houses to the Sun and the Moon, to ancient Rishis who composed the Vedic hymns, or to heroes who were present at the Swayamvara of Draupadi, or fought in the war of *Mahabharata.* Chronology was perverted by caprice or imagination. Thousands of years were assigned to a single reign. The result is that to this day the eras of the Vedic hymns, the war of the *Mahabharata,* the exile of Rama, and the invasion of India by the Vedic Aryans are as utterly unknown as the date of Stonehenge.

Probable strategy of the Aryan invaders

But although the chronology is hopelessly lost, some idea of the progress of the Aryan invasion may be derived from a consideration of the face of the country. The Punjab has already been indicated as the Indian home of the Vedic Kshatriyas; and consequently the basis for all military operations on the part of the Vedic Aryans against the aboriginal or non-Vedic population of the valleys of the Ganges and the Jamuna. It is a compact territory lying to the north-west of India; and is watered by the Indus and its tributaries, which appear on the map like the sacred

candlestick with seven branches.[71] The eastern-most tributary of the Indus was the river Saraswati, which formerly separated the Punjab from the rest of India. Indeed the Saraswati was to the Vedic Aryans what the river Jordan was to the Israelites. It cut them off from the rich valleys of the Jamuna and the Ganges, which lay stretched out before them like a land of promise; to the Rishis a land flowing with milk and butter; to the Kshatriyas a land of flesh-meat and savoury game.

The area of the Aryan invasion thus comprised the greater part of the region between the tributaries of the Indus and the basin of the Brahmaputra; although the stream of Aryan conquest had probably spent its force before it reached Bengal. This area was traversed from the west to the east by the rivers Jamuna and the Ganges, which appear on the map like an irregular two-pronged fork. The two prongs take their rise in the Himalayas near the sources of the Indus, and bend around in two parallel lines towards the south-east, until they converge and form a junction at Allahabad, the ancient Prayaga. The united streams then flow in one current from Allahabad, in an easterly direction towards the ancient city of Gour. There the river elbows round towards the south, and diverges into two channels, known as the Hughly and the Ganges, which form the delta at the head of the Bay of Bengal.

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71. The Punjab literally signifies the land of the five rivers, namely, the Indus, the Jhelum, the Chenab, the Ravee, and the Sutlej. To these may be added the Beas and the Saraswati, making seven rivers in all.

The one point of paramount importance in all India is Allahabad, the ancient Prayaga, which is seated at the junction of the Jamuna and the Ganges. Here the Vedic Rishis, inspired alike by poetic fancy and religious fervour, would approach the union of the two river deities with reverential awe. Here the Aryan Kshatriyas, with true military instinct, appear to have constructed a fortress which secured all the conquests on the upper valleys of the Jamuna and the Ganges, and overawed all lower Bengal. Accordingly, Rajput tradition points to Prayaga as the most ancient city of the Rajputs or the sons of Kings.[72] It was the holiest place of sacrifice for the Rishis, and the most commanding stronghold for the Kshatriyas, in all India.

Three probable lines of Aryan fortresses

The Vedic Aryans thus probably held the valleys of the Jamuna and the Ganges by three lines of fortresses, as indicated in the map. The first line would be formed by Indraprastha and Hastinapur at the northern entrance to the two valleys. The second line would be formed by four fortresses, each of which may have been situated about half-way down their respective rivers, namely, at Agra on the Jamuna, at Kanouj on the Ganges, at Lucknow on the Gumti, and at Ayodhya on the Gogra. Further to the south and east, there would be a third line of fortresses along the main stream of the Ganges, and chiefly at the junctions of rivers,

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72. Tod's *Rajasthan,* vol. i, chap. iv, p. 39.

namely, at Allahabad, at the junction of the Jamuna and the Ganges; at Banaras, near the junction of the Gumti and the Ganges; at Pataliputra, near the junction of the Sone, the Gogra, and the Ganges; and at Gour, near the point where the main stream diverges into the Hughly and the Ganges.

Three stage of Aryan invasion

It may thus be assumed that northern India in ancient times was occupied by at least ten Vedic Aryan fortresses, which were destined to become the capitals of kingdoms, the emporiums of trade, and the centres of religious thought. They would appear to be arranged in three lines of advance, illustrating three distinct stages of Aryan invasion, namely—the colonial, the conquering, and the imperial. During the colonial period, the Vedic Aryans probably occupied the lands around Indraprastha and Hastinapur on the upper courses of the Jamuna and the Ganges. During the conquering period, they may have advanced halfway down the four important rivers which water northern India, and established a line of fortresses at Agra, Kanouj, Lucknow, and Ayodhya. During the imperial period, they may have established a third line of fortified capitals at the junctions or divergence of rivers, namely—at Allahabad, Banaras, Pataliputra, and Gour.[73]

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73. The above description of Vedic Aryan fortresses in Hindustan is of course conjectural. Pataliputra, somewhere near modern Patna, became the metropolis of the Gangetic empire of Magadha. Gour, at the elbow of the Ganges, may possibly have been of Turanian rather than Aryan origin. According to the old Persian tradition, Gour was founded by a conqueror from Cooch-Bihar, a territory in the neighbourhood of the opposite elbow of the river Brahmaputra.

The Aryan conquest must have convulsed northern India, but all memories of the struggle are buried beneath a jungle of legend. It was a fabled war of gods against demons; the invaders were Aryan devatas, the deities of fire and light, the fair-complexioned heroes from the highlands of ancient Persia. The enemies against whom they contended, and whom they drove slowly into the east and south, were the earth-born demons of ancient India; the black-skinned barbarians, who are described with all those exaggerations of hatred and distorted fancy with which cultured invaders generally regard a race of fierce aborigines. These non-Aryan races were called Dasyus, Daityas, Asuras, Rakshasas, and Nagas. They were depicted as giants, man-eaters, hobgoblins, ghosts, and serpent kings. In other words, they propitiated ghosts and serpents, and were identified with the deities they worshipped. But still there are traces amongst the non-Aryan races of widely different stages of civilisation. The giant cannibals, who haunted jungles and infested villages, were probably savages of a low type; but the Nagas, or serpent-worshippers, who lived in crowded cities, and were famous for their beautiful women and exhaustless treasures, were doubtless a civilised people, living under an organised government. Indeed, if any inference can be drawn from the epic legends, it would be that, prior to the Aryan conquest, the Naga Rajas were ruling powers, who had cultivated the arts of luxury to an extraordinary degree, and yet succeeded in maintaining a protracted struggle against the Aryan invaders.

Traditions of the Nagas

The traditions of the Nagas are obscure in the extreme. They point, however, to the existence of an ancient Naga empire in the Dekhan, having its capital in the modern town of Nagpur; and it may be conjectured that prior to the Aryan invasion, the Naga Kings exercised an imperial power over the greater part of the Punjab, northern and eastern India. Representatives of this ancient people are still living in eastern Begal, and beyond the north-east frontier, under the names of Nagas and Nagbansis; but they are Turanians of a low type, and retain no traces of their origin beyond rude legends of their descent from some serpent ancestor, and vague memories of having immigrated from Nagpur.[74] They may be ranked amongst the so-called aborigines, who have either no religion at all or become slightly Hinduised. They are the relics of an extinct nationality, and have outlived their race. But references to the ancient Naga empire abound in Hindu stories. The clearance of the jungle at Indraprastha was effected by the expulsion of the Nagas. One of the heroes of the *Mahabharata* had an amour with the daughter of a Naga Raja.[75] The Aryan conquest of Prayaga, and other parts in India, are mythically described as a great sacrifice of serpents.[76] Occasional

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74. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal,* pp. 169, 231, etc.

75. See *History of India* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. iii, part i, p. 36.

76. *History of India* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. i, part v; 'Mahabharata'. pp. 46, 74, 141, 411, et seq.

references to the Nagas will also appear hereafter in the Buddhist and Brahmanical legends; and to this day, traces of the Nagas are to be found in numerous sculptures of the old serpent gods, and in the nomenclature of towns and villages from Nagpur in the Dekhan to Tanja-nagarum, the modern Tanjore, in the south-east cost of the remote peninsula.

Serpent worship: its phallic character

The serpent worship of the Nagas has formed a powerful stimulus to religious thought from time immemorial. The serpent, with its poisoned fang, its association with the phallus, and its fabled homes in the underworld, seems so suggestive of all that is terrible, sensational and mysterious in humanity that it will lead the imagination far beyond the limits of experience, unless the attention is strictly confined to actual data. The European regards the serpent with an instinctive antipathy; and such may have been the feeling of the Aryan invaders.[77] But this antipathy is by no means shared by the masses. The Aryan element is perhaps the weakest in Bengal, and amongst the Dravidian populations of the south; and there the serpent is regarded as a beneficent deity, and is approached with reverential awe. It is propitiated as the deity of a tree, as the guardian of secret

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77. The great god of the later Aryans was Vishnu, a spiritual conception of a supreme deity which grew out of the worship of the Sun. The antipathy of Vishnu towards the Nagas is shown by his being represented as riding on the man-bird Garuda, the devourer of serpents and a remorseless enemy of the serpent race.

treasure, as the domestic god of the family or household, and as a symbol of the power of reproduction. In Bengal, barren wives creep into the jungle to propitiate the serpent of a tree with an offering of milk, in the simple faith that by the favour of the serpent deity they may become mothers. Under such kindly aspects, the poisoned fang is forgotten, and the reptile is invested with a benevolent character. But there are strong reasons to suspect that the worship of the snake, and the practice of snake charming, formed important elements in an old materialistic religion, which may at one time have prevailed amongst the Dravidian populations, and of which the memory still lingers throughout the greater part of India. In the later mythological system, the world itself is supported by the great serpent; whilst Siva and Durga, the deities of death and reproduction, are represented with cobras in their hands as symblical of their supposed powers.[78]

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[78]The part played by the serpent in the later mythological systems of the Hindus, will be further illustrated in dealing with the history of the Brahmanical revival in chap. vii. It may, however, be remarked that the worship of the serpent was almost universal in ancient times. It appears in Egypt as well as in India; in the garden of Eden where it tempted Eve, and in the temple of Jerusalem where it was broken up by Hezekiah. According to Greek tradition, the Scythian race was fabled to be descended from Herakles and the serpent woman Echidna (Herod, iv, 9, 10) ; and the people of Burma claim to be descended, in like manner, from a mother half-serpent and half-woman. Doubtless it was the traditional hatred of the serpent, combined with a morbid animosity against the fair sex, that led Milton to personify Sin as:

'Woman to the waist and fair,
But ended foul in many a scaly fold.'

The results of the collision between the nature worship of the Aryans, and the phallic worship of the Nagas and the Dravidians, must be in a great measure left to conjecture. But one new and important form of religious thought appears to have been an outgrowth of the collision, and has for thousands of years exercised a paramount influence over the Indian mind. This was Brahmanism, or the worship of the supreme spirit as Brahma, which was taught by a class of holy men or sacred philosophers, known as the Brahmans. This religious question, however, must be reserved for a separate chapter. Meantime, it may be worthwhile to bring under review such information as can be gathered from ancient legends and inscriptions regarding the original forms of government which prevailed in India, and to ascertain how far they may be traced in the governments of modern times.

Hindu constitution: Village communities of Landholders

The political organisation of the people of India, whether Aryan or Dravidian, seems to have borne a general resemblance to that of the Teutonic people. It originated in the clearance of primeval forests by the pioneers of humanity. Bands of colonists appear to have migrated from some parent settlement and cleared the jungle with fire and axe, like the Pandavas; and finally to have established new homes and means of livelihood, without throwing off the ties of allegiance and

kindred to the parent stem.[79] Every new clearance gradually grew into a village; and every village became subject to those internal changes and revolutions which are inseparable from the progress of the human race. In the first instance, the village was probably formed by a group of colonists, who cultivated the lands in their collective capacity for their common benefit; and it is not improbable that in this primitive stage of colonial society, the rude system of polyandry prevailed similar to that which was practised by the Pandavas. But the idea of landed property seems, from a very remote antiquity, to have followed a corresponding development to those of marriage and family. In due course, the village comprised a community of independent householders,

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79. Besides the mythic account of the colonisation of Indraprastha by the Pandavas, which is to be found in its original form in the *History of India* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. i, 'Mahabharata', chap. v, a valuable tradition has been preserved of the colonisation of the great forest in the southern peninsula, which was carried out in the days of the old Rajas of Chola, or Chola mandalum, the Choromandel or Coromandel of the seventeenth century. In ancient times, the kingdom of Chola occupied the lower Carnatic between the eastern ghats and the sea; but the region north of the river Palar was a dense jungle. According to a legend preserved in the Mackenzie manuscripts, a Raja of Chola took a Naga lady, either as his wife or a concubine, by whom he had a son, whom the people would not accept as their Raja. Accordingly, the prince went out with a miscellaneous band of emigrants, slaves and volunteers, and began to make clearances and established villages in the forest northward of the Palar. During the first six years, no share of the crops was to be claimed by the Chola Raja. For the seventh year of cultivation, the emigrants were to pay one-tenth of the produce as land tax; for the eighth year, one-ninth; for the ninth year, one-eighth; and for the tenth year, one-seventh; and for all following years, one-sixth. See Mackenzie MSS. in the Library of the Bengal Asiatic Society, vol. i.

each of whom had his own family, his own homestead, his one separate parcel of arable land for cultivation, and a common right to the neighbouring pastures. The multiplication of families was followed by new clearances; and thus the deep forest was largely brought under the subjection of man, and cultivation advanced with the increase in population. But whilst the individual householder was the supreme head of his own family within the limits of his own homestead, he was bound as a member of the village community to conform to all its multifarious rules and usages as regards the order of cultivation, and the common rights of his neighbours to graze their cattle on the pastures. In the present day, the independence and privacy of the family are maintaned by the Hindus to an extent which renders their domestic life a sealed book to Europeans; whilst land is regarded more and more in the light of property, belonging as strictly to the family as the homestead in which they dwell.[80] The

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80. Maine's *Lectures on Village communities.* Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England,* chaps. ii and iii. Elphinstone's *History of India,* Book II, chap. ii. As regards the Teutonic communities, Sir Henry Maine observes that the land was always originally distributed into exactly equal proportions, corresponding to the number of families in the township; and that at first the proprietary equality of these families was further secured by a periodical re-distribution of the several consignments. He adds that traditions of this periodical distribution are still preserved in Indian villages, and that the disuse of the practice is sometimes mentioned as a grievance. Some further evidence, as regards the existence of these traditions, would be valuable. Probably they refer to the ancient system of cultivation, known as the Joom system, in which a portion of the jungle is burnt down and serves as manure. This system is still in vogue amongst hill tribes, and necessitates an annual removal to different lands during a period of ten years.

ancient village community of independent landholders, governed by common rules and usages, naturally acquired a political organisation of its own. It comprised the homesteads of the different families; the several allotments of arable lands ; and the common land for pasture. Its affairs were conducted by a council of elders; or by the council in association with a head-man, who was either elected to the post by the village community, or succeded to it as a hereditary right.[81]

Village officals and art artisans

The village thus became not only the basis of a political organisation, but a type of kingdom of which it was an individual member. The head-man corresponded to the king; the council of elders to the council of chiefs and people. At a later period of

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81. The general type of Hindu village remains much the same in the present day, but in the course of ages, the organisation of individual villages has been greatly modified by their individual histories, especially as regards the mode of paying the annual land revenue to the ruling power. Three different revenue systems may be especially mentioned, namely, the village joint-rent system, the ryotwary, and the zemindary. Under the joint rent system, the inhabitants of each village pay through their head-man a yearly lump sum for the whole of their lands; and thus they are left to allot to each one of their number the lands he is to cultivate and the yearly contribution he is to pay. In the ryotwary system, the government takes the rent direct from each individual ryot, or village landholder. In the zemindary system, the revenue is collected through a middle man, known as a zemindar, whose powers vary with cricumstances, and range from those of a tax-collector to those of a baron.

Besides the village landholders, there are four other classes, namely, permanent tenants, temporary tenants, labourers, and shopkeepers. But wherever there are village landholders, they form the first class of inhabitants.

development, each village had its own officials; such as the accountant, the watchman,[82] the priest, the physician, and the musician. It also had its own artisans, as the blacksmith, the carpenter, the worker in leather, the tailor, the potter, and the barber. These officers and artisans were generally hereditary, and were supported by grants of rent free land, or by fees contributed by the landholders in grain or perhaps in money.

The ties which bound these villages together in groups were never very strong. Manu refers to lords of ten, twenty, a hundred, and a thousand villages; and traces of the ancient distribution are still lingering in such names as parganah and zillah. Since the introduction of the British government as the paramount power, the villages still remain, but have been grouped into districts, and placed under the charge of district officers, according to the convenience of the local administration. In this way the villages have existed in some shape from time immemorial. Towns have grown out of villages, or formed of clusters of villages. To use the words of Lord Metcalfe, the village communities are little republics having nearly everything they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last when nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty, they remain the same; revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindu,

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82. The duties of the watchman are more multifarious than the name seems to convey. He is the guradian of boundaries, public and private. He watches the crops, and is the public guide and messenger. He observes all the arrivals and departures; and next to the head-man, is the principal officer of police.

Pathan, Moghul, Mahratta, Sikh, English, are all masters in turn; but the village community remains the same.[83]

Brahmanic India

The origin of the Brahmans is one of the most obscure points in the annals of ancient India. They are barely mentioned in the Vedic hymns, and were certainly not recognised as a dominant hierarchy during the period when the Vedic Aryans were as yet confined to the Punjab. But in every later stage of their history, and down to the present day, they have been represented as a hereditary and exclusive caste of holy men, specially created out of the mouth of the god Brahma for the performance of sacrificial rites, and also for the conservation of sacred learning, and the interpretation of the Sanskrit scriptures, which are emphatically known as the Vedas.[84] Moreover, throughout the whole of their history, and down to a comparatively modern date, their claims

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83. *Report of Select Committee of House of Commons,* 1832. Quoted by Elphinstone. The village system prevails over the greater part of India, but has faded away from Bengal.

84. Further particulars regarding the Brahmans and the Vedas will be found in Talboys Wheeler's *History of India,* which deals with the Hindu epics and the laws of Manu. But the following details will suffice to explain the statement in the text:

The Hindus are divided into an infinite number of castes, according to their hereditary trades and professions; but in the present day, they are nearly all comprehended in four great castes, namely, the Brahmans, or priests; the Kshatriyas, or soldiers; the Vaisyas, or merchants; and the Sudras, or the servile class. The Brahmans are the mouth of Brahma; the Kshatriyas are his arms; the Vaisyas are his thighs; and the Sudras are his feet.

to the respect of all other castes appear to have increased from age to age; until at last they have been hedged around with a superstitious reverence, almost approaching worship. Notwithstanding the spread of western civilisation and enlightenment, this reverence for the Brahmans continues to retain a deep and inscrutable hold upon the imagination of the masses. It is no disgrace, but rather a religious duty, and an act of religous merit, for the mightiest king to pay homage to the meanest Brahman; and this conviction is strengthened by the ignorant belief that the blessing of a Brahman will be followed by good fortune and prosperity, whilst his curse will bring the direst calamities upon the impious offender. Moreover, even those Brahmans who have never exercised any religious or priestly calling, and have devoted themselves to secular concerns, are still regarded as having a divine origin, and consequently entitled to

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The three first castes of priests, soldiers and merchants are distinguished from the fourth caste of Sudras by the thread, or paita, which is worn from the left shoulder, resting on the right side below the loins. The investiture usually takes place between the eighth and twelfth year, and is known as the second birth, and those who are invested are termed the 'twice born'. It is dificult to say whether the thread indicates separation between the conquerors and the conquered; or whether it originated in a religious investiture from which the Sudras were excluded. As regards the four Vedas, the *Rig-Veda* is the oldest and most important. The *Rig-Veda* is divided into three portions, each of which indicates a certain stage in religious development, namely, the hymn of prayer and praise, the sacrificial ritual, and the metaphysical worship of the supreme spirit under a variety of names. Technically, they are known as Mantras, Brahmanas, and Upanishads.

homage. The Brahman sepoy will implicitly obey his commanding officer, although of an inferior caste; but when the military duty is over, and the uniform is laid aside, the officer falls back into his inferior position and propitiates the Brahman with reverential awe.

The secular Brahmans, however, may be excluded, for the present, from all consideration. They were nothing more than men who were born within the caste of priests, but who followed other pursuits. The Brahmans who devoted themselves to a religious calling are alone invested with historical significance. They appear in two distinct capacities, namely, as priests or sacrificers, and as sages or philosophers. The priest was generally a married householder, who maintained his family after the manner of ancient priests. He performed sacrifices for hire. He officiated at births, deaths and marriages. He appeared occasionally as a seer, diviner, genealogist, astrologer, school-master, expounder of the law, and worker of spells and incantations. Moreover, the presentation of alms to the Brahmans had always been regarded as a religious duty, which expiated sins and promoted the prosperity of the giver; and thus in a superstitious age, the Brahman priest was generally well provided for. Sometimes he lived in the neighbourhood of a temple, or in a street appropriated to the Brahmans; but there was nothing beyond his religious or semi-religious avocations to distinguish him from the ordinary type of Hindu householder. The Brahman sage, on the other hand was supposed to have no thought or care for his daily subsistence. He abstracted himself from all public and social life,

and dwelt in the retirement of a grove or hermitage, where he subsisted on roots and fruits or on such alms as the people of the neighbourhood might choose to offer him. In this manner he prepared himself by religious duties, pious studies, sacred contemplations, and fasting and other penances, for a more spiritual life hereafter. Sometimes the sage was married, or at any rate passed a portion of his life in matrimony; for as he belonged to a hereditary caste, it was generally considered necessary that he should become the father of a son. Some sages, however, led lives of celibacy, and kept but one object in view throughout their lives, namely, the purification of the soul from every stain of affection, desire, and passion, so that after death it might return to the supreme spirit. The distinction between these two classes of priest and sage must be constantly kept in mind. Occasionally, the characteristics of both are blended in the same individual. The illiterate priest will act as a sage, and perform religious contemplations and austerities; or the sage will practise daily sacrifices as part of his religious duties in the seclusion of the grove or hermitage. Again, both classes are included under the general name of Brahmans, which seems to have been borrowed from the term Brahma, which signifies both the supreme spirit and divine knowledge. But a line of demarcation between the mercenary sacrificers and the pious and contemplative sages has still been preserved.[85]

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85. For a learned exposition on the term Brahman, see Muir's *Sanskrit Texts,* vol. i, second edition, chap. iii.

Vishnu, Siva and Brahma

The priests or sacrificers from the bulk of the Brahmanical community; and their religious ideas and practices seem to have been always of a popular and primitive character. They were prepared to sacrifice, that is, to offer food and liquor, to any and every deity whom the people desired to propitiate, whether they belonged to the Vedic or non-Vedic population. Two deities were specially worshipped by the Brahman priests, and appear to have been the types of two different races, the Aryans and the Turanians. These were Vishnu and Siva; sometimes propitiated under the names of Hari and Mahadeva. The Greeks identified these two gods with Herakles and Dionysos. Vishnu was an old Vedic conception, more or less associated with the sun; but he appears in the Hindu pantheon as an embodiment of heroic strength and god-like beauty. Siva was a mystic deity of Turanian origin, and represented as half-intoxicated with drugs, and associated with ideas of death and reproduction. To these may be added a third deity, Brahma, who was worshipped as the supreme spirit, who created and pervades the universe. In the present day, all three—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—are often individually and collectively identified with the one Supreme Being.

Animal sacrifices

In ancient times, the ritual of the Brahmans included the sacrifice of animals, such as beasts and birds; although at some extraordinary epoch, to be noticed hereafter, the slaughter of

animals was prohibited, and offerings of rice and butter were intoroduced in their stead.[86] The Brahmans naturally arrogated to themselves the exclusive right to perform sacrifices. They declared that if sacrificers who did not belong to the Brahman caste were employed, the deity would be offended. At the same time they exaggerated the power and efficacy of sacrifice. It was considered to be always grateful to the gods, and if performed with certain ceremonial and mystic utterances, it would ensure victory, dominion, and every prosperity. The Brahman priests also professed to ascertain from the appearance of the victim, and from the colour and form of the sacrificial flame, whether

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86. Annual sacrifices formed a part of the rituals of the Brahmans of the *Rig-Veda,* known as the Aitareya Brahmana. (See Haug's edition of the original Sanskrit text accompanied by an English translation, 2 vols. Bombay, 1863.) Such sacrifices were considered allowable by Manu, although the practice was deprecated. (See Talboys Wheeler's *History of India,* vol. ii, 'Brahmanic Period', chap. x.) Animal sacrifices were abolished by Asoka about the third century before Christ.

The Brahmans, however, from a very early period, presented such simple offerings to the gods as boiled rice and clarified butter, after the manner of the ancient Rishis. But in the old Brahmanical ritual, these offerings were invested with a mystic meaning which was apparently unknown to the Rishis. Thus rice signified the male principle, and melted butter the female. The so-called sacrifice was thus associated with the materialistic religion of the non-Vedic population. (Haug's *Aitareya Brahmana,* Book I, chap. i.) This fact throws a new light upon the legend of Cain and Abel. Cain offered the first-fruits of the ground; Abel, the first-fruits of the flock. The flesh sacrifice was accepted; but the vegetable offering was rejected. So far it would seem that the story was intended to enforce sacerdotal ideas. But offerings of grain were especially associated with a materialistic religion, as in the Greek worship of Demeter; and this form of idolatry was condemned in the strongest terms by the Hebrew prophets. Hence the offering of Cain was rejected.

the offering was acceptable or otherwise. Finally, they taught that sacrifice was a great religious merit, which would not only prove pleasing to the deity, and win the divine interposition in behalf of the worshipper, but would act as an atonement or expiation for sins committed against the moral and religious laws.[87]

The doctrine of atonement by sacrifice indicates an important stage in religious development. There certainly was no idea of atonement in the so-called sacrifices of the Vedic Rishis, or the flesh-feasts of the Kshatriyas. Such an idea must have originated in a sacerdotal age, when sacrifices were a source of profit to the Brahmans; and also in an age of settled government, when sinners were supposed to expiate their sins by sacrifices, penances, and almsgiving, in the same way that criminals expiate their offences by punishment and fines.[88]

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87. It would be an endless task to review the interminable ritual of Brahmanical sacrifices. Much of it was associated with ideas appertaining to the sexes, which apparently indicate a non-Vedic origin. Thus the Diksha ceremony is nothing more than a symbolical representation of the neophyte being born again. Haug's *Aitareya Brahmana,* Book I, chap. i.

88. It is a significant fact that religious development often runs in the same groove as political development. In patriarchal times, as in the days of the Rishis, the head of the family or tribe performed the duties of the priest. But when monarchical government assumed and organised form, it was generally accompanied by an ecclesiastical hierarchy having a similar organisation. The sovereign had his ministers; the deity had its priests. The sovereign made known his will by means of edicts; the diety made known his will by means of oracles. The ministers claimed a share of the harvests and flocks, and the payment of tribute or taxes, for the service of the sovereign.

The religion of the Brahman sages or philosophers was of a totally different character from that of the priests. It was not promulgated to the masses, but only communicated to the philosophic few. It does not appear to have been a foreign worship, but indigenous to India, growing out of the existing creeds, but in the first instance abstracting itself as far as possible from the prevailing idolatries. It thus takes the form of a secret religion, which was taught only as a mystery; and probably this was its character in a remote antiquity. This Brahmanical teaching involves three distinct dogmas, namely—the creation of the universe, the supreme spirit pervading the universe, and the transmigrations of souls. These dogmas will be found to be of considerable importance in dealing with the progress of religious development in India; and therefore it will be necessary to consider them separately in their elementary and Oriental form.

Creation of the universe by the supreme spirit Brahma

The idea of the creation of the universe seems to have been generally formed at a comparatively later stage in religious development. Primitive man accepts the universe as it is; as something which has existed from time immemorial, and will continue to exist for an indefinable period. He may form rude conceptions of ancestors and first parents, but his curiosity goes no further. Men are born, and that is the beginning of them;

The priests, in like manner, claimed first-fruits, firstlings, and tythes for the service of the deity. Again, the ministers chastised offenders by fine and punishment; and the priests chastised sinners by enforcing almsgiving, sacrifices, and penances.

they die, and that is the end of them. But in the process of time, his imagination plays upon his affections until he believes in ghosts; and then his natural sense of justice suggests places of punishment or reward for these ghosts. A consideration of the end of being necessarily leads to a consideration of the origin of being. Then follows an unrecorded age of speculation, which the modern mind can neither realise nor follow. The Hebrew conception of deity was that of a sovereign ruler; and consequently, the work of creation was carried out by the vivifying breath of Elohim, moving upon the face of the waters, and calling the universe into existence by the divine command.[89] The Phoenician idea was more mystical; Ether became enamoured of Chaos, and produced a watery mixure or mud from which sprung the seed of the creation.[90] The Brahmanical conception was of the same character, but more materialistic in its expression. The god Brahma placed a productive seed in the waste of waters, which germinated into an egg, and finally expanded into the universe of gods, men, and living creatures.[91]

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89. Von Bohlen's *Genesis,* vol. ii, p. 8. London, 1868.

90. Sanchoniatho, in Cory's *Fragments.*

91. Manu's account of the creation has already been analysed and criticised at length. See Talboys Wheeler's *History of India*, vol. ii, part v, 'Brahmanic Period', chap. v. It will suffice to say that the phallic idea sufficiently predominates to prove that Brahma was originally a phallic deity. The creation of the universe was very generally symbolised by an egg enfolded by a serpent. This has been interpreted to represent the union of ether and chaos. It seems, however, to have originated in the far more materialistic idea that the serpent, as a symbol of the phallus, was imparting life to the egg as as a symbol of the universe. The serpent finds no expression in the original Brahmanical cosmogony. In modern cosmogony, Sesha Naga, or the great snake, appears as the supporter of the universe.

This idea of the creation by Brahma may have been borrowed from the materialistic religion of the non-Vedic population. But the second idea of a supreme spirit pervading the universe was either an outgrowth of the Vedic worship of the elements, or was modified by that worship into a spiritual form. If Fire, Water, and Ether were regarded as deities by the Vedic Aryans, they might easily be accepted by the Brahmans as the manifestations of that creative force which was involved in the conception of Brahma. In this way the Brahmans appear to have elevated their god Brahma to the highest dignity over the gods of the invaders, by representing him as a supreme spirit who pervaded the universe; as the divine original from whom had emanated all the Vedic Aryan deities, as well as the human race and the whole range of living creatures.

Dogma of the metempsychosis, or transmigrations of the soul

The third and last dogma, namely, that of the transmigrations of the soul after death, seems to have had a different origin. It finds no expression in the Vedic hymns, and, indeed, could scarcely have been evolved out of the Vedic religion. It appears rather to have grown out of the mysteries of death and reproduction, which were associated with the worship of the serpent and the linga. If life was followed by death, so death might only be the introduction to a new life; in other words, after the death of the body, the soul entered a new body, either of a human being or an animal. The ancient religion of Egypt was evidently derived from the same materialistic source, and

had developed into the same speculative belief, that the soul was immortal, and that when it had passed through its allotted course in one body, it entered another body. The Brahman sages imparted a deep religious significance to this dogma. They taught that each successive existence was a reward or a punishment exactly proportioned to the good or evil deeds that had been performed in previous existences; that the poorest man might enjoy wealth and prosperity in the next life by being strictly virtuous and religious in the present life; and that the most powerful sovereign might be condemned to poverty and disease in the next life, if he failed in his religious duties in the present life. The chain of transmigrations was not confined to humanity, but extended over the whole range of animated being. A virtuous animal might thus become a happy man; and a wicked man might become a miserable worm or a reptile.[92]

This chain of existences was practically eternal; although, as will be seen hereafter, there is a saving clause, that if the soul be sufficiently purified from all the passions and desires of existence,

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92. This dogma of the metempsychosis, or 'ever-changing habitations of the soul', is often stated with arithmetical precision. If the sum of good deeds exceeds the sum of evil deeds in previous lives, the individual soul will be born in a higher scale of being, and enjoy a degree of happiness in exact proportion to the balance of merits. If, on the contrary, the sum of evil deeds is in excess, the individual soul will be born in a lower scale of being, and suffer a degree of misery in exact proportion to the balance of demerits.

it will return to the supreme spirit Brahma, from whom it had originally emanated.[93]

The Brahmanical conception of the creation may be dismissed as a metaphysical dream; devoid of all humanity, although grossly material. The conception of the Creator as a supreme spirit is equally devoid of religious significance. It may have amused the imagination, but it utterly failed to reach the heart. It has been much over-valued in consequence of its supposed identification with the one God, who is worshipped by the Jews and the Christians. But Brahma was not a personal deity. He was neither a universal ruler nor an eternal father. The idea of Brahma was simply a deification of a primeval male, who created the universe, pervaded the universe, and governed the universe like an unseen machine, whose movements were regulated by inexorable laws. This conception of a supreme spirit was formed by divesting all the Vedic deities of their human sympathies and feelings ; of every attribute, in fact, which endeared them to their worshippers and rendered them objects of devotion and adoration; and then resolving all that remained into one immaterial essence. It is obvious that so far the theology of the Brahmans was without any moral meaning. It satisfied no yearning, furnished no consolation, and utterly ignored the affections. But without

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[93]This dogma of the return of the human soul to its Creator has originated a controversy as to whether the human soul became absorbed in the divine spirit, or enjoyed a separate and individual existence in what may be called the heaven of the divine spirit, *i.e.*, the heaven of Brahma. The controversy is of no practical moment, although to this day it continues to excite sectarian discussions.

human sympathies, theology soon dies away into a metaphysical dream. They are the life-blood of theology. Man cannot worship any deity, any more than he can worship beauty, excepting through the medium of humanity.

Antagonism between the metempsychosis and the old theology

It seems difficult to understand the circumstances under which the Brahman sages could have formed such a speculative conception as that of a supreme spirit creating and pervading the universe. There is nothing to show why the worship of the gods, as practised by the Brahman priests from time immemorial, should have been sapped of all its vitality by the introduction of a metaphysical element which could have recommended itself only to the philosophic few. It is certain, however, that at some remote and unrecorded period, the religious life of the eastern world received a shock by the promulgation of the dogma of the transmigration of souls from which it has never recovered. This doctrine dawned upon humanity like a new religion, and threatened to overwhelm the worship of the gods, and to break down every barrier of caste. The idea that the soul after death entered a new body, either of a human being or an animal, is by no means an unnatural one. It pleased the imagination, for it accounted for certain marks of human intelligence in animal life, whilst imparting a deep significance to the whole range of animated being. It further recommended itself to reason because it solved a problem which had distressed the human race from time immemorial. Thoughtful men, the socialists of ancient days, saw

good and evil scattered over the universe by a blind fatality, which was not only unintelligible, but contrary to the common sense of justice. Wealth and poverty, pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity, beauty and deformity, strength and infirmity were showered down like undistinguishing rain upon the just and the unjust, without the slightest reference to their moral or religious deserts. The virtuous man was often wretched, and the wise man a beggar; whilst the wicked man was often prosperous, and the fool was burdened with riches. The dogma of the metempsychosis removed every difficulty. Men could no longer rail at the blindness of fortune, or rail at the injustice of the gods, when they had accepted the law under which all good and evil forunes were regarded as the results of actions which had taken place in previous lives, and which had long since passed out of the memory and conscious experience of the individual.[94]

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94. This dogma of the metempsychosis re-acted, in its turn, upon the conception of Brahma as the supreme spirit. Brahma was self-existent as the Supreme Soul. As the individual soul passed through endless transmigrations, so the Supreme Soul passed through endless creations. Each universe was supposed to endure for about five milliards of years, and was then followed by a chaos which lasted for a similar period. Each successive universe was supposed to be a day of Brahma; and each successive chaos was supposed to be a night of Brahma. The fabled chronology of the Brahmans thus vanishes away into a childish dream. Brahma awakes and the universe springs into being; he sleeps and it sinks into chaos. A day and night occupies ten milliards of years. The year of Brahma comprises three hundred and sixty of these days; and Brahma will exist for a hundred years. Practically, Brahma is eternal. A distinction has also been made between Brahma, the supreme spirit, and Brahma, the creative force. The point is of no practical importance. See *History of India* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. ii, part v, 'Brahmanic Period', chaps. i and v.

The promulgation of the dogma of the metempsychosis, or 'ever-changing habitations of the soul', indicates a further stage in the progress of religious development, which corresponds, in some measure, to a revolt against the gods. The doctrine of atonement by sacrifice had marked a certain advance in theology. The gods were no longer mere guardian deities to be gratified with meat and wine. They had assumed the form of divine rulers, who governed the world like despots, and demanded sacrifices, penances, and offerings in expiation of any infringement of their laws. A gloomy superstition was thus imparted to the national religion, which was calculated to chill the old enthusiastic devotion springing from the affections. Under such circumstances, it may be assumed that the enlightened few had grown dissatisfied with the popular conception of deity and sacerdotal worship. The dogma of the metempsychosis was the expression of a democratic revolt against the irresponsible despotism of the gods. It struck at the root of theology, for it taught that man by his own acts could raise himself higher and higher in the scale of being. It deprived death of all its terrors by representing it as a new birth into a better and happier life. It was, in fact, a religion of good works, as opposed to a theology based upon conventional faith. But it could make no permanent breach in the sacerdotal religion of the Brahman priests; and it utterly failed to carry the old Indian gods by storm. It has left its mark on the religion of the Brahman sages; but they only formed a limited class of the community. It still lingers as an idea in the mind of the general population, and finds expression

in conventional language, but it exercises no perceptible influence upon the religious life of the masses.[95]

Religion of the Brahman sages—a compromise between the metempsychosis and the old theology

The religion of the Brahman sages was indeed little more than a compromise between the new philosophy of the metempsychosis and the old sacerdotal theology. They accepted the dogma of the metempsychosis, but were not prepared to abandon the ideas of worship and deity. They did not interfere with the popular religion of the masses. They left it in the hands of the priests or sacrificers, whilst they retired to the seclusion of their groves and hermitages, and wrought out a new and comprehensive religion of their own. They imparted a philosophic character to the old theology by teaching their disciples that all the gods of the universe were resolved into the conception of the supreme spirit Brahma; and they imparted a theological character to the new philosophy by teaching that the primary object of the truly wise should be to escape from the bondage of successive transmigrations, and become absorbed in the supreme spirit, and thus enter upon an indefinable existence of eternal beatitude. In this manner the old ideas of sacrifice and penance were brought into play, but under new forms. They were not atonements for

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95. This is only true as regards the modern Hindus. It will be seen hereafter that the dogma of the metempsychosis exercised a very powerful influence amongst the Buddhists of ancient India, as it does to this day amongst the Buddhists of Burma.

sins, but purifications of the soul. Sages devoted themselves to the contemplation of the supreme spirit in the universe, and to excessive mortifications of the flesh, in the hope of thereby reducing themselves to mere abstractions. It was doubtless by such an utter abnegation of humanity that they excited the superstitious awe of the populace, and invested themselves with the halo of divinity, which still finds expression in the national sentiment.[96] Meantime, the old gods were never abandoned by the masses. Indeed, the worship of the gods is an instinct of ordinary humanity. Men have always aspired to please the divine rulers and guardians of the universe, by special acts of adoration, and the celebration of special festivals in their honour. Whilst, therefore, the Hindus may have listened to metaphysical teaching, and paid reverence to the philosophic sages, they continued to employ the Brahman priests to perform the old sacrifices and ceremonial which had been practised by their forefathers from time immemorial. They believed that whilst the gods were duly worshipped, the country prospered; and this conviction could not be shaken by the dogmas of a supreme spirit and the transmigrations of the soul.

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96. The sacred books of the Hindus are filled with stories of sages and saints who engaged, for a long term of years, in constant sacrifices, severe austerities, and deep abstract contemplations of the Supreme Being in his various manifestations. By these performances, they were fabled to acquire such supernatural powers that they could drink up seas, remove mountains, change the courses of rivers, and compel the gods generally to fulfil their behests. These, no doubt, were the outgrowth of popular superstitions, fostered by the Brahman priests as throwing a reflex glory over the whole caste.

It may now be possible to indicate the more important stages in the history of the Brahmans. In that remote age which may have preceded the Aryan invasion, the Brahmans were probably the priests of a phallic deity named Brahma, from whom they derived their distinctive name.[97] Subsequently, in the character of a hereditary priesthood, they officiated as sacrificers to all the gods, whether of the conquerors or the conquered. This spirit of conciliation or comprehension has always characterised the Brahmans, and is perhaps the main cause of their success. They identified foreign gods with their own; and then by virtue of their hereditary rank they officiated in the worship of all.[98] The Aryan conquerors, the Kshatriyas of the epics, had previously been their own priests; but they could have had no objection to employ the Brahmans as sacrificers. The Brahmans probably were Aryans like themselves, and had already established a powerful influence over the general population. Moreover, they must have made a deep impression upon the Kshatriyas; for whilst the priests, properly so-called, appeared as a sacerdotal caste of sacred origin, the sages were supposed to be endowed with divine wisdom and supernatural powers by virtue of their rites and austerities.

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97. The caste system of both India and Egypt seems to have originated in the worship of the phallus.

98. They thus identified Agni, the Vedic deity of fire, with their own god Brahma, the supreme spirit.

Development of the Brahmans into a national priesthood

Thus in the process of time, the Brahmans would be recognised by the Kshatriyas as the only agents between man and deity; as the only priests who were authorised to offer sacrifice. Henceforth they became identified with the Aryan invaders, and every conquest effected by the Kshatriyas outside the Brahmanical pale was followed by the introduction and establishment of the Brahmanical hierarchy. The Vedic Rishis either disappeared, or joined the priests and bards of other races. In this manner the Brahmans ultimately became the one national priesthood of India. They officiated in the public temples and in private dwellings, at festival celebrations and in family or domestic worship. They performed all the great ceremonies on such state occasions as the consecration of kings, the commencement of hostilities, the thanksgivings for victory, the propitiation of offended deity in times of defeat, drought, or pestilence. They also performed the necessary rites at births, deaths, marriages, the sowing of seed, the gathering in of harvest, the building of dwellings, the planting of trees, the digging of wells, and other similar incidents in the life of the people. They also cast nativities, practised divinations, prognosticated future events, and uttered spells or incantations over weapons and implements of every kind. These pursuits they continued not only after the Aryan conquest, but down to the present day ; and at the same time they took the place of the Rishis at the worship of the Vedic deities, and sacrificed at the great Yajnas, or flesh-feasts of the Kshatriyas.

The Brahmans, however, assert that they are representatives of the ancient Rishis who composed the Vedic hymns, and that they have formed a dominant spiritual hierarchy from time immemorial. They have divided themselves into eight Gotras, or families, corresponding to the eight famous Rishis from whom they claim to have descended. For ages they have been the sole conservators of the Vedic scriptures, which they regard as having been more or less inspired by their god Brahma. As a natural consequence, their pretensions have been generally admitted; and the worship of the supreme spirit, as the Creator of the universe, and the dogma of the transmigrations of the soul, have been regarded as an outgrowth of the old Vedic worship. But it has already been seen that the assumed origin of the disitinctive religion of the Brahman sages is open to question. Again, the Indian home of the Vedic Aryans was in the Punjab, to the westward of the river Saraswati. The Indian home of the Brahmans was apparently in northern and eastern India, and extended from the Saraswati eastward to the banks of the Ganges, in the neighbourhood of the ancient city of Kanouj.[99] Moreover, the Rishis were not formed into a caste, nor does any authentic allusion to caste distinctions occur in the earlier Vedic hymns. The Brahmans, on the contrary, are represented from a very ancient period as forming an exclusive and hereditary priest caste; and much of their religious teaching turns upon their caste distinctions.

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99. See Talboys Wheeler's *History of India*, vol. ii, part v, 'Brahmanic Period', chap. ii.

Brahmans regarded by the Kshatriyas as an inferior caste

These marks of difference between the Vedic Rishis and the Brahmans are all the more worthy of notice from the fact that in ancient times, neither the Rishis nor the Kshatriyas entertained that respect for the Brahmans which has been displayed in more modern times. The Brahmans had undoubtedly made their way into the Punjab, whilst the Vedic Aryans were mere colonists in the land. But the Rishis composed satirical hymns against the Brahmans, which have been preserved to the present day. They compared the penances of the Brahmans to the torpid condition of frogs during the dry season; and they likened the utterances of the Brahmans at their sacrifices to the croaking of the same animals. They, moreover, ridiculed the vows of celibacy which were occasionally taken by Brahman sages, by humorous representations of the complaints of neglected wives.[100] The Kshatriyas, also, who engaged the Brahmans to officiate as priests, and regarded them with a certain contempt as mere mercenary sacrificers, were guilty of an unpardonable assumption if they attempted to establish themselves on an equality of position with the military community.[101]

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100. See Talboys Wheeler's *History of India,* vol. ii, part v, 'Brahmanic Period', chap. iii.

101. This sentiment is fully expressed by the Kshatriyas who were present at the Swayamvara of Draupadi, when they saw that Arjuna wore the garb of a Brahman. In the Buddhist code of Manu, the Brahmans rank below the Kshatriyas.

Status of the Brahman sages

In a subsequent age, when the primitive conception of Brahma became amplified into the dogmas of a supreme spirit, and the transmigrations of the soul, the bulk of the Brahmans must have presented the same heterogeneous character which they still retain. Indeed it would only have been the more advanced sages of the caste, the intellectual literati, who could apprehend and expound the mysteries of the new philosophy. Such sages must have been very far removed from the illiterate priests of the temples and domestic life. They appeared, in fact, as the pious few, who abstracted themselves from all worldly concerns, and dwelt under trees and groves in the outskirts of towns and villages. Here their ostensible object was to purge their souls from all earthly passions; to render themselves superior to all pleasure and pain, and indifferent to all sensations and emotions; so that after death, their purified spirit might return to Brahma. With this view they entered upon a holy life of temperance and chastity, subsisted on a vegetable diet, practised severe austerities, performed a daily religious ceremonial and sacrifice, and mortified the flesh in every possible way. Such were the Brahmans as they appeared at the advent of Gautama Buddha and Alexander the Great. They were each attended by disciples to whom they expounded all the mysteries of their religion, and taught the various ways by which the fervent worshipper could devote the whole energies of his body and soul to the contemplation of the supreme spirit. Many of them were founders of different schools of metaphysics, all

tending to the same conclusion, although pursued through different labyrinths of bewildering thought; namely, that the universe was contained in the supreme spirit; that all living beings were originally emanations from that spirit; and that all were subject to the laws of transmigration until they were sufficiently purified to return to the supreme spirit from whom they had originally emanated.

It may now be possible to apprehend the nature of that religious revolution which was agitating the Hindu mind from a remote antiquity. The higher order of sages were becoming famous throughout the land for their transcedental wisdom, their severe austerities, their mystic sacrifices, and their profound contemplations. Some were worshipped as divine beings. Others, again, were supposed to have acquired such vast supernatural powers by the force of their penances and austerities that they could compel even the gods to fulfil their behests. Meantime, the bulk of the Brahmans, the ordinary priests of everyday life, continued to worship the old gods as a means of livelihood; but at the same time, they professed Brahmanical ideas and teachings as a means of acquiring respect, and exercising a more powerful influence over the masses. They appear to have encouraged the belief that no act of merit was equal to sacrifices and almsgivings; but at the same time they were supposed to perform penances, to engage in the contemplation of the supreme spirit, and to exercise supernatural powers. Thus the idea of goodness and kindness became obscured by the darkness of

superstition. The religion of the heart was stifled under a ritualism, which was as devoid of moral meaning as the indulgences granted in the Middle Ages. Sacrifices ceased to be a festive offering of meat and wine to the gods. Almsgiving was no longer a spontaneous offering to the priests. Both rites were converted into religious merits; in other words, into atonements for sin by which the conscience was silenced whilst the heart remained untouched. The wicked expected the slaughter of hecatombs of victims to the deities, and the presentation of costly gifts to the Brahmans. The doctrine of vicarious sacrifices and merits crowned the whole system. The most heinous offences were supposed to be wiped away by the sacrifices and penances which were performed by a priest or a preceptor on behalf of a cruel or depraved offender. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that the Brahmans eventually acquired an ascendancy which destroyed the political life of every Indian nationality, and rendered the introduction of a foreign power a necessity to the people at large.

The part played by the Brahmanical community in the various revolutions of India—religious, political, and social—will abundantly appear in subsequent chapters. Before, however, opening up these new vistas in Indian history, it may be useful to glance at that ideal life, which had been prescribed by the Brahman sages, and which has been recognised from an unknown antiquity, although it is rarely carried out except in theory. It may be summed up in a few words. The Brahmans were a hereditary caste, appointed by the god Brahma for the worship of the deity. They

dwelt in separate communities, sometimes in hermitages, and at other times in streets or villages of their own. They subsisted on such simple fare as grain, vegetables, and fruit, regarding milk, butter, and curds as their choicest delicacies. Their whole time was occupied, as far as might be, with religious worship, such as sacrifice, prayer, penance, contemplation, and sacred studies; and every secular action of their lives—from the cradle to the burning ground, from the moment of rising in the morning till the moment of retiring to rest at night—was governed by some precept of purity or worship. Thus cleaning the teeth and rinsing the mouth were performed every morning, equally with the worship of the gods, according to a strict and minute set of rules; and every meal was accompanied by an offering or sacrifice to the deity. Such a life could only be faithfully carried out under conditions of the strictest celibacy. But the Brahmans were a hereditary caste. It was consequently the duty of every Brahman to become a husband and father, in order that he might leave representatives to carry on the work of religious worship.

Four stages in the ideal life of a Brahman: The student the householder, the hermit, the devotee

The whole existence of a Brahman was thus mapped out into the four periods of youth, manhood, middle age, and old age; and the mode of life suitable to each period is elaborately laid down by the Brahmanical lawgiver Manu.[102] During the

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102. See Talboys Wheeler's *History of India,* vol. i, part v, 'Brahmanic Period', chap. x.

first period, a young Brahman lived in the house of a preceptor of his own caste, and was taught all the learning, ceremonial, and moral and religious duties of the Brahmans; and in return for this instruction and maintenance, he rendered menial services, such as cutting wood, bringing water, or preparing the daily sacrifices. On reaching the second period, the Brahman left his preceptor, and commenced life as a householder. A wife was given to him, and he was formally presented with a cow. He now, if possible, drew his subsistence from endowed land, and received alms and offerings; but he was to avoid the habit of begging, lest by taking too many gifts the divine light should fade away from his soul. The Brahman householder might also engage in trade and moneylending, but he was not to follow any pursuit which was incompatible with his sacred calling, or engage in any service which was beneath his hereditary dignity. The most appropriate employment for a Brahman householder was that of a priest and preceptor, who devoted his whole time to daily worship and imparted sacred knowledge to his pupils or disciples. The third period, or middle age, was of an entirely different character. Hitherto the Brahman may be assumed to have lived like a good man, doing his duty to his family, and setting a righteous example to his neighbours. But he would now think of preparing himself for a higher and holier state of existence. For this end, he would throw off all family cares and anxieties; he would seek some secluded hermitage in the jungle, and there subsist on fruits and

roots. Thus he would lead a life of celibacy and self-mortification until he had overcome all earthly appetites and desires. Finally, when he was freed from all sensations or emotions of joy or pain, he would enter the fourth period of life, and devote his whole time as a Sannyasi to the contemplation of the divine spirit, so that after death, his soul might escape from the trammels of material existence and become absorbed in Brahma.

The religious life of the Brahmans, notwithstanding its selfish isolation from other castes, is not without its attractions. But they formed a hereditary caste, and there is perhaps no institution more demoralising to a religion than a hereditary priesthood. It excludes the men, who are otherwise fitted by character, tastes, and religious enthusiasm, from pursuing a sacred calling; and it admits a large number in whom the religious instinct is very weak, and the passion for wealth or power is very strong. The result of a hereditary priesthood in India is that there are but a few Brahmans who faithfully lead the ideal life prescribed by the ancient sages. They are generally pharisaically strict in the practice of all outward observances, through pride of caste, and fear of incurring disrespect; but otherwise they degenerate into mercenaries. In the social life of the Hindu drama, which belongs to a later period, they appear as parasites, jesters, men of the world, and political intriguers; and beyond their claims on the score of birth, they possess none of the virtues or attributes which are fondly ascribed to the ideal Brahman of the old.

The organisation of the Brahmans into an ecclesiastical hierarchy belongs to a comparatively later period in their history, and will consequently be treated in a subsequent chapter. But there is one remarkable institution associated with their religion, which may be traced back to a very remote age, when the dogma of the transmigrations of the soul was as yet unknown. This was Sati, or the practice of burning the living widow with the body of her deceased husband.

The slaughter of a wife or concubine at the obsequies of a deceased husband seems to have been a Scythian custom. It was an outgrowth of a belief in ghosts. The dead man was supposed to require the society of a favourite wife or concubine in the world of shades.[103] The Aryans appear to have had no such custom. After the great battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the dead bodies of the slain were burnt on funeral piles, but none of the widows were burnt with them. Again, none of the numerous queens of Dasaratha were put to death at his funeral obsequies. If a man died childless, his widow was expected to bear a son to the nearest kinsman; but otherwise the widows of a king continued to live in the royal residence under the protection of his successor.

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103. See *Herodotus,* iv. 71. The same idea finds expression in an episode of the *Mahabharata.* See Talboys Wheeler's *History of India,* vol. i, part ii, 'Mahabharata', chap. ix. The question of whether the Scythians were of Aryan origin need not be discussed here. See Rawlinson's *Herodotus,* Book IV, Appendix, Essay II, Ethnography of European Scyths.

The Scythic and the Aryan usage

The original distinction between the Scythic and Aryan usage is thus obvious. The Scythians buried their dead; the Aryans burned them. The Scythians slaughtered a living female to enable her to accompany the dead man; the Aryans placed the widows in charge of the new head of the family. Both usages found expression among the Rajputs. The dead man was burnt according to the Aryan fashion; but the living widow was burnt with him in order that she might accompany her husband to the world of spirits.

The rite of Sati, as practised by the Rajputs, may thus be described as a Scythian usage modified by the Aryan culture. The bodies, dead and living, were no longer buried, but burned. The female was no longer slaughtered as an unwilling victim to the selfish sensuality of a barbarian. On the contrary, she was the widow of a high-souled Rajput; the reflex of his chivalrous devotion; prepared to perish with him in order that she might accompany her deceased lord to a heaven of felicity.[104] The Scythian Sati was further modified by the Aryan worship of Fire

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104. Amongst the Thracians, the widows of the deceased man were said to dispute amongst themselves as to who was the best beloved, and consequently the best entitled to accompany her husband (*Herodotus,* v. 3). The same idea finds expression in an imaginary conversation between the widows of Pandu, which is apparently a later addition. See *History of India* by Talboys Wheeler, vol. i, part ii, 'Mahabharata', chap. i.

and the Sun. Agni, or Fire, was the purifying deity. She was not only the domestic goddess of the household, but the divine messenger that carried the sacrifice to the gods; the purifying flame that bore away the widow and her lord to the mansions of the Sun. In this manner the horrible rite, so revolting to civilisation and humanity, was imbued with an element of the religion of the affections. It elevated the helpless concubine into a self-sacrificing heroine; the distracted widow into a joyful and triumphant bride. The future of the bereaved woman was no longer a vista of shame and sorrow. She ascended the pile as the chariot of fire which was to carry her away to the arms of her glorified bridegroom in the realms of bliss.[105]

Such was the rite which the Rajput and the Brahman carried to nearly every quarter of India. It was the expression of the highest conjugal affection, combined with the lowest state of female degradation. The unfortunate widow had no way of escape from a joyless life of servitude, excepting by the most horrible of sacrifices. The honour of the family depended upon the heroism

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105. The earlier notices of Sati amongst the Hindus are to be found in the Greek accounts of the expedition of Alexander in the fourth century before the Christian era. The rite is there said to have been adopted as a check upon the women who occasionally put a husband to death for the sake of a younger lover. (Strabo, *India*, sect. 30.) The Greek story may have been based upon authentic tradition. In the age of the Aryan or Rajput conquest, a captive princess often became the unwilling wife of her conqueror; and, under such circumstances, was sometimes tempted to revenge the affront by poison or the dagger.

of the woman; and the widow was too often condemned to the pain of martyrdom when the heroism was altogether wanting. The victim was stupefied with drugs, and adorned as a burnt offering. She was led by the Brahmans to the pile from which flight was impossible. The timber was set on fire by the nearest kinsman, and often by her own son, amidst the deafening noise of drums, and the cries of an excited throng.[106] But in the present day, humanity may draw a veil over the scene.

Concluding Remarks

The two earliest ages in Hindu history, namely, the Vedic and Brahmanic perids, have now been investigated; and the results have been classified into chapters, and reduced to an avalable form. But still the labour of the historian is incomplete. The utter want of perspective, which has hitherto characterised the early legends of India, as it characterises those of ancient Greece, has only been partially filled up. It is true that the ideas and institutions of the Vedic Aryans have been distinguished from those of the

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106. It will be unnecessary in the present day to dwell upon the horrors of the Sati; further details respecting it will, however, appear hereafter in the progress of history. But the following verses by a poet of peninsular India are supposed to express the feelings of the son whilst firing the funeral pile of his living parent, and furnish a powerful illustration of the inhumanity of the practice. Strange to say, although the dogma of the metempsychosis finds no expression in the rite itself, it is yet introduced in the verses. The description of the funeral ceremony, apart from the Sati, corresponds with the burning of Maharaja Dasaratha.

Brahmans; and so far the task may be regarded as satisfactory; inasmuch as the two periods have for ages been blended into one in the belief of the people of India. But with this exception, the ordinary requirements of history appear to be altogether wanting. Imagination may fill the ear with the roar of distant ages, and please the eye with visions of primeval men; but there is no vista of the past carrying the mind back by successive stages to the earliest glimmer of legend. Two pictures are certainly presented, one of the Vedic times, and the other of the Brahmanic times; and it appears to be established that the two differed widely from each other. But in each case there is a want of chronological sequence. The annals of the Vedic Aryans, and the annals of the Brahmans, are alike unknown; and no record whatsoever has been preserved of the circumstances under which the two have been blended together; although the process by which the ideas and institutions of the Vedic age have been Brahmanised in Hindu literature has been partially explained. The question, therefore, remains

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Extracts from the song of Pattanatta Pillei, as he performed the funeral rites for his mother.

(i) 'In what future birth shall I see HER, who for ten moons, burdened, bore me; and when she heard the word Son, lovingly took me up in her rosy hands and fed me from her golden breast ?

(ii) 'Shall I kindle the flame to consume Her, who for three hundred days of weariness and longing, morn and evening imploring Siva's grace, was borne down by me a burden ?

(iii) 'Shall I place HER on the pile and kindle it,—HER, who in the cradle, on her bosom, on her shoulder, caressed me, fanned me, singing soothing lullabies ?

to be solved of whether it is possible, by comparing the different phases of civilisations which appear to belong to different epic traditions, to discover the clue to a chronological sequence, which shall in any degree correspond to the notion of annals that is implied in the modern idea of history.

Limits of the inquiry

Before, however, attempting this task, it will be necessary to define clearly the limits of the inquiry. Many questions have been passed over in the present work, which have been largely and profitably discussed by eminent Sanskrit scholars, and especially by the great

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(iv) 'Shall I put the rice into that mouth, my mother's, with which she was wont to call me her honey, nectar, her only wealth, her boy ?

(v) 'Shall I heap up rice on the head of HER, and place the firebrand with unflinching hand and steady eye; who softly raised me, pressed her face to mine, and called me oft her son ?

(vi) 'Sorrow for my mother kindles the fire, deep within, and I too have kindled the fire ! See, it burns ! it burns !

(vii) 'It burns ! It burns to ashes—Alas !—the hand which soothed me, and reared me, and led me so tenderly that its touch would not have frightened away the timid bird !

(viii) 'Is she ashes now ? Hath she come already to thy feet, O Siva ? Hath she, evermore gazing on thee, rejoicing, forgotten me, her son ?

(ix) 'She was erewhile ! She walked in the way ! She was here but yesterday ! To-day burned, become ashes ! Come all, unlamenting, sprinkle milk, All is in Siva's power !'

Translated by G.U. Pope. See Dubois' *Description of the People of India,* p. 221, footnote. Madras, 1862.

school of German philology, of which Lassen and Weber may be regarded as representatives. Among these questions may be mentioned the origin of the Vedic people, and their apparent line of march before they entered the Punjab; the interpretation of Vedic myths by reference to natural phenomena; the reduction of traditions of individual heroes into allegorical histories of tribes or clans; and the classification of Vedic and Brahmanic literature into epochs, like that which has been attempted with so much success by Max Müller. The importance of these inquiries, as contributions to the history of human development, cannot be denied; but they can scarcely be regarded as having a direct bearing upon a history of the Hindus, which has been mainly undertaken for the purpose of illustrating the civilisation and institutions of the people, with special reference to their present condition and future prospects. Moreover, an exhaustive investigation of these points would necessitate a preliminary training of many years in purely philological studies; and such a training would tend to wean away the mind from such historical criticism as is based upon the lives of men, rather than upon their languages. Finally, with all respect for the eminent scholars whose names have been mentioned, grave doubts may perhaps be expressed as regards the reduction of many of the epic traditions into descriptions of natural phenomena, or allegorical histories of tribes or clans. That the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* abound with mythical allusions of the former character cannot be doubted; and Max Müller's translation of the hymns will, in all probability, open up a new field of thought in this direction.

But, as regards the Hindu legends in the epics, another question has to be taken into consideration; namely, whether natural phenomena has not often been described in language and illustrated by incidents, which have been borrowed from authentic tradition. Again, it is a comparatively easy task to select certain incidents in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana,* and point out the striking resemblance which they bear to astronomical phenomena; but it would be as easy to select certain incidents from modern history and biography in which the resemblance would be equally startling. Therefore, unless the upholders of the so-called mythological theory are prepared to show that the whole of the epics are amenable to a mythological interpretation, their method may possibly prove an *ignis fatuus,* tending in many cases to lead the student astray from the beaten track of authentic tradition into the field of conjectural allegory. The attempts which have been made to transmute the Tale of Troy, and indeed the whole mass of Greek legends, into similar myths can by no means be regarded as satisfactory; and other attempts which have been made to reduce the sacred traditions of the Hebrews to the same category are still more open to criticism. The same remarks would, in some measure, apply to the theory which would reduce some of the traditions of individual heroes to allegorical histories of tribes or clans. Here, however, a distinction must be laid down between mythological legends of the gods, and what appear to be historical traditions of heroes. Legends of Indra and other gods, and the

wars between gods and demons, appear to be generally capable of allegorical interpretation. But the case seems somewhat different as regards the epic traditions of individual heroes, who have never been admitted into the Hindu pantheon, or who have only been deified at a comparatively recent period. As regards this latter class of traditions, the simple method has been preferred of stripping the authority of the eminent scholars by whom they have been suggested.[107]

First scene in Indian history: the Vedic Aryans in the Punjab

The first scene in the history of India opens upon the Aryan occupation of the Punjab. A teeming population had apparently been settled for generations, and perhaps for centuries, in the land of the five or seven rivers. That the people had attained a certain civilisation is evident from the allusions to houses, chariots, mailed armour, ships, and merchandise, which are to be found in the Vedic hymns as well as in the epics. Their means of subsistence appear to have been generally drawn from lands and cattle; and doubtless their civilisation varied not only according to the affluence or otherwise of different families, but according to the fact of whether they dwelt

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107. It is much to be regretted that the works of the leading continental Orientalists have not been reproduced in an English form. In India, there are many scholars, both Indian and European, who would be glad of such a re-publication of the works of Lassen, Weber, and some others, who are at present only known at second-hand or by reputation.

in long-established and well-protected villages, or in new and outlying settlements recently cleared from the jungle, and bordering on an alien population. In that remote period, the river Saraswati flowed into the Indus; and it is easy to infer from the hymns, already quoted, that a line of Aryan settlements was to be found on the banks of both the rivers. In the subsequent age of Brahmanism, the Aryans had conquered Hindustan, and the geography of the region bordering the Saraswati had almost faded away from the national memory; and but little was known beyond the fact that the river itself disappeared in the sand long before it reached the Indus.

Second scene in Indian history: the Aryan conquest of Hindustan

The period between the establishment of Vedic settlements on the Saraswati, and the Aryan conquest of Hindustan, probably covers an interval of thousands of years; and yet the only positive facts which have been preserved in connection with this period are the disappearance of the Saraswati and the rise of Brahmanism. Certain inferences, however, may be drawn from the epic legends and traditions which have been reproduced in the present work, as well as from obscure and isolated allusions in other sacred books. It should, however, be added that whatever may have been the date in which the epics and Institutes of Manu received their present form, the old Vedic and Brahmanic ages preceded the advent of Buddhism; and, consequently, they preceded the invasion of Alexander, and cannot be illustrated by the coins and

inscriptions which have been hitherto discovered, and which appear to belong to a later era. Probably, however, it will be seen hereafter that the history of the Buddhist period furnishes further illustrations of the Brahmanic era, in the same way that Brahmanic literature has been found to furnish illustrations of the Vedic period.

Phases of Civilisation

Under such circumstances, it may perhaps be worthwhile to compare the different phases of civilisation which appear to characterise different legends, and then to attempt a classification of the results in a form corresponding to annals. In the history of every people of which a record has been preserved, there appear to have been three political stages, namely:

1. The Patriarchal.
2. The Heroic.
3. The Monarchical.

Each of these stages, however, may be more or less modified by three different and powerful elements, which have their origin in human nature, and are more or less common to all classes of the community, namely:

(i) The instinctive desires which develop into passions.

(ii) The yearning after individual freedom and power, which finds expression in democracy.

(iii) The higher aspirations for temporal and spiritual good, which are involved in the conception of religion.[108]

A critical narrative of the modifications produced upon the three stages of political development by the instincts, the yearnings of democracy, and the aspirations of religion, would form the very essence of history ; and would prove infinitely more valuable than the narratives of migrations, wars, and court intrigues, to which the name of history has been often improperly applied. Accordingly, it may be advisable to arrange the historical conclusions, to be gathered from the Hindu traditions, as far as possible under the three heads of patriarchal, heroic, and monarchical ; and at the same time to inquire step by step how far each stage in Hindu history has been modified by the three influences indicated.

1. Patriarchal age of Hindu history illustrated by the war of *Mahabharata* and the adventures of the Pandavas at Virata

The most valuable illustrations of the patriarchal age of Hindu history are perhaps to be gathered from the tradition of the great war of *Mahabharata*, and the episode which describes the adventures of the Pandavas in the court of King Virata. These two stories present important differences as regards religious belief, and must therefore be considered separately.

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108. This classification is not strictly logical, as democratic and religious yearnings might, with certain reservations, be reckoned amongst the intincts. But the classification is practical and intelligible, and controversy is avoided by its adoption.

The tradition of the war of *Mahabharata* involves, in the first instance, the settlement of a family at Hastinapur on the banks of the upper Ganges, which had been conquered and cleared by a remote ancestor. The pursuits of this family were eminently patriarchal. The cultivation of land is implied, though not directly expressed; probably because according to the caste system, which was fully in force when the tradition was reduced to its present form, the cultivation of land was left to the Vaisyas and the Sudras. The keeping of cattle, however, is sufficiently indicated by the fact that the younger members of the family were accustomed to go out into the pastures at regular intervals for the purpose of marking all the calves, and re-marking all the older cattle. There were two branches in the family, namely, the sons of a reigning chieftain who were named the Kauravas, and those of a deceased cheiftain who were named the Pandavas. All were brought up together and trained to protect their crops and cattle against enemies and robbers; and thus they were all more or less proficient in pugilism, wrestling, archery, throwing stones, casting nooses, and hurling chakras. As regards enemies, there appears to have been a feud with a neighbouring king named Drupada; whilst the Bhils in the neighbourhood were kept in strict subordination.

Subsequently a breach arose between the Kauravas and the Pandavas; and the Kauravas remained behind at Hastinapur whilst the five Pandavas went out with their mother and founded a new settlement at Indraprastha on the banks of the Jamuna.

Laxity as regards marriage in the family traditions

An episode occurs in connection with this new settlement, which illustrates the prevailing idea as regards marriage. Monogamy and polygamy seem to have been recognised institutions in the family history of the settlement at Hastinapur; but otherwise there appears to have been little sentiment in the marriage unions. A young damsel was induced to become the wife of an aged chieftain, by the promise that any sons she might bear him should inherit the estate to the exclusion of the heir-apparent. In another case, three young sisters were carried away by force to be the wives of a young king. Again, the widows of a deceased Kshatriya were made over on his death to his nearest kinsmen, in order that sons might be begotten to inherit the family estate. Lastly, before the Pandavas started clearing a new settlement at Indraprastha, they married one woman amongst them, according to a depraved custom which finds expression in the Vedic hymns; the eldest brother being regarded as the real husband of the lady, whilst the younger brothers were permitted to share his privileges.[109]

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109. The idea which prevails among the Bhuteas, who still practise polyandry, is that a younger brother is entitled to a share of the wife of the eldest brother until he procured a wife of his own; and that in return for this privilege, he is bound to render personal service to the household, and is expected to make some presents to the wife. The question of parentage is settled by the mother.

Life at Indraprastha

Glimpses of the old colonial life of the five brothers and their joint wife at Indraprastha frequently appear beneath the dense overgrowth of later myths. The daily meals were apparently cooked and distributed amonst the brothers, first by the mother and afterwards by the joint wife. The Pandavas cleared their land by burning down the jungle; and in so doing they appear to have come into collision with a Scythian tribe of Nagas or snake-worshippers. After the Pandavas had established themselves at Indraprastha, they give a great banquet, called a Rajasuya, which appears to have been an assertion of possession or sovereignty, but which is represented in the *Mahabharata* as a great sacrifice to Indra and the other Vedic deities. Subsequently, the Kaurvas challenged the Pandavas to a gambling match and the Pandavas lost both their estate or kingdom, and their wife Draupadi; but were later permitted to depart with Draupadi, on the condition that they should absent themselves for thirteen years. The residence in the jungle is chiefly valuable as it furnishes an illustration of an ancient law that a wife should never be captured until her husbands had been first conquered.

Feud between the Pandavas and Kauravas settled by a war to the knife

The feud between the Kauravas and the Pandavas was subsequently settled by a terrible war; and the narrative becomes more fruitful with illustrations of patriarchal times. The

negotiations which preceded the war appear to have been carried on in an age when writing was unknown, for messages were sent between the rival parties by word of mouth. The war which ensued between the Kauravas and the Pandavas was almost like a savage contest between wild beasts. The warriors fought with their fists, feet, and teeth; and cut and hewed and mangled and maimed each other with knives and clubs. Sometimes they threw an enemy down, and knelt upon his breast, and cut off his head; and in one case a warrior drank the blood of his slaughtered enemy with wild exultations of joy. The victory was ultimately gained by the Pandavas, but on the night of their final triumph, their camp was broken open by an ally of the Kauravas who had survived the fray, and their five sons were slaughtered, and the bleeding heads carried off as trophies of the revenge which had been achieved. The Pandavas resigned themselves as they best could to this fearful blow, and ultimately effected a reconciliation with their uncle, whose sons had fallen in the war. They performed the funeral rites of the slain, which are remarkable as showing the absence of all idea of burning the living widow with the dead husband.

Return of the Pandavas to Hastinapur

Finally, the Pandavas returned in triumph to the old family inheritance, and inaugurated their eldest brother Yudhishthira as king; and eventually asserted his supremacy as lord paramount of all the neighbouring kings by the celebration of an Aswamedha. In this significant ceremony, a horse was let loose by the Pandavas

to wander where it pleased; a proceeding which was regarded as a challenge to all the neighbouring kings, either to acknowledge their submission by letting the horse alone, or to hazard a battle by leading it away. After the lapse of a certain time, said to be a year, during which the Pandavas had asserted and maintained their suzerainty by conquering all who interfered with the horse, a great feast was held, in which the horse was killed and roasted as a sacrifice to Indra, and then served up to the conquered kings who attended as guests.

Allegorical myths referring to wars against the Scythian Nagas

The story of the great war is followed by some myths, which throw a curious light upon the subsequent fortunes of the reigning house at Hastinapur. These myths seem to refer to some ancient wars between the Aryans and Scythian Nagas, or snake-worshippers. Parikshit, who succeeded Yudhishthira in the kingdom, is said to have been killed by a snake, which seems to indicate that he was slain by a Naga. In revenge, his son Janamejaya is said to have performed a sacrifice of snakes, in which the snakes were irresistibly impelled by the divine power of the sacrificing Brahman to enter the sacred flame; a myth which seems to cover a tradition of some treacherous massacre of Scythic Nagas at a great banquet. In later legends, these Nagas are identified with the Buddhists; and it is not improbable that these legends denote the subsequent overthrow of the reigning dynasty in the neighbourhood of Delhi by a Buddhist conqueror.

Free play of the instincts in the patriarchal age

The illustrations of the patriarchal period, which are furnished by the tradition of the great war of *Mahabharata,* may be further amplified by a consideration of the modifications of the patriarchal stage of human development, which were produced by the instincts, the yearnings of democracy, and the aspirations of religion. At such an early period, the instincts appear to have had full play, and the passions became the dominant powers. The Pandavas sacrificed all sentiment to instinct by taking one wife amongst them. They were driven by sheer want to clear out lands and keep cattle in a distant jungle, where they appear to have been surrounded by enemies and robbers. Finally, after they had lost their cleared lands at a gambling match, they were impelled partly by want, and partly by a passion for revenge, to enter upon a bloody fratricidal war, which terminated in the destruction of their rival kinsmen. In like manner, the rude democratic yearning and uncultured religious aspirations partook of the nature of instincts. The young men simply struggled against the authority of the elders, and plunged into a war contrary to the sober counsel of experienced age. The religious idea consisted in offering to their rude national or tribal gods such savoury meat as pleased themselves for the sake of imparting a superstitious significance to the possession of cultivated land, and to the assertion of superiority over their neighbours. A few sentiments, chiefly in reference to war, seem to have been more or less recognised by the warrior caste of the patriarchal period. The precept that a

wife should not be carried away as prize, until her husband had been conquered, has already been noticed. To this may be added the notion that a challenge should always be accepted; that a third party should never interfere whilst two combatants are fighting; that death is to be preferrd to dishonour; that revenge is more or less a virtue. The Oriental passion for revenge has always attained a fearful growth both in the patriarchal age, and in the heroic time which follows it, when each man does what seems right in his own eyes. The terrible massacre perpetrated by the sons of Jacob, in revenge for the seduction of their sister Dinah by the Prince of Shechem, is a striking illustration of the force of this sentiment. So too is the episode in the life of Samson, whose Philistine wife had been given away by her father to one of his companions; and who thereupon set on fire the standing corn of the Philistines by attaching firebrands to the tails of three hundred foxes. In return for this outrage, the Philistines burnt both the faithless wife and her offending father; and again in revenge for this atrocity, the Hebrew slew a thousand Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass. The history of Aryan rule has for ages been characterised by the story of such bloody feuds, excepting when order has been maintained and justice administered by a paramount power.

Patriarchal basis of the story of the adventures of the Pandavas at Virata

The second tradition which appears to illustrate the patriarchal age is to be found in the episode in the *Mahabharata,* which

narrates the adventures of the Pandavas and their wife at the court of King Virata.[110] This tradition is presented in an artificial form corresponding to later Hindu fiction; but it certainly has a patriarchal basis. The king kept cattle which were carried away by an enemy. Upon this the ryots and herdsmen were required to bring all the remaining cattle into the so-called city, which was probably only a fortified village; whilst the king or chieftain marched out with his servants to pursue the cattle-lifters and recover what had been stolen. The main point, however, that demands consideration is the belief that ghosts can be comforted by the society of a favourite female, a belief which subsequently found a modified expression in the rite of Sati. It should here be remarked that, whilst a belief in ghosts is fully intimated in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda,* there is apparently no reference in those hymns to the burning of a living widow with a dead husband; nor, indeed, is there any trustworthy reference to such a rite in the Vedic traditions which have been preserved in the epics. On the contrary, the widows of those who were slain in the great war of *Mahabharata* were not burnt with their dead husbands, but lived many years afterwards ; whilst neither a wife nor a concubine of King Dasaratha, the father of Rama, was put to death at his decease. But the story of the adventures of the Pandavas at the court of King Virata throws considerable light upon the origin of Sati, before it was associated with Brahmanical doctrines, or

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110. All the Hindu legends quoted here have been dealt with in other books by the author.

even involved the idea of a voluntary sacrifice on the part of the widow. The downright realism of the story has already been commented upon, and furnishes curious illustrations of the primitive customs of patriarchal times. The commander of the forces falls in love with the waiting maid of the queen who is his sister. He asks his sister to send the maid to his house, which is accordingly done; but the maid refuses to listen to his proposals, being in fact the wife of the Pandavas in disguise. Subsequently, the maid feigns consent, and agrees to give him a meeting; but sends one of her husbands in her room. Accordingly, instead of meeting a mistress, the lover finds himself at the mercy of the husband, who eventually pommels him to death. The brothers of the dead man then determine to burn the living maid with the corpse, partly to avenge his death, and partly to solace the ghost of the deceased with her society in the world of spirits.

Scythian custom of strangling a concubine at the grave of a king

The idea is perhaps not Aryan but Scythian; that is, if any opposition between Aryan and Scythian is to be recognised. According to Herodotus, the Scythians were accustomed, on the death of a king, to strangle one of his concubines, and bury her with him, without apparently any regard to her willingness or otherwise.[111] The custom might also have been adopted as a

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111. *Herodotus*, iv, 71.

safeguard from all attempts at assassination on the part of a wife or a concubine. It may therefore be inferred from these data that King Virata was the chieftain of a Scythian tribe, which had encamped in the neighbourhood of an Aryan settlement. It does not, however, appear that the Scythians of Virata were Nagas or snake-worshippers, like those with whom the Pandavas fought in the jungle; although the identity is not impossible, inasmuch as the peculiar habits of snakes, in disappearing in holes beneath the surface of the earth, led to their being worshipped in primitive times as deities of the underworld, and that worship still lingers in every quarter of India.

Difference between the Aryan and Scythian treatment of widows

The difference between the Aryan and Scythian custom may now be indicated. Amongst the Aryans, a widow was made over to a kinsman of the deceased husband; amongst the Scythians, a favourite widow or concubine was sent to accompany the dead man. That the Aryan custom ultimately fell into disuse amongst the twice-born castes, and was superseded by the later Sati, subsequently to the promulgation of the Institutes of Manu, has already been shown. Still the fact, that traces of the rite are to be found in a tribe dwelling in India during the Vedic period, seems to justify an investigation of those instinctive passions under which it eventually merged into Brahmanical law.

Two ideas are involved in the later Brahmanical rite which find no expression in the early Scythic form, namely, that the act

was voluntary on the part of the widow, and that it was associated with a well-grounded belief in the immortality of the soul. The widow, indeed, entered the fire with a profound conviction that she would thereby rejoin her husband in abodes of bliss. The Thracians had a similar custom, except that the widow was not burnt, but slaughtered at the grave of her dead husband by her next of kin; and it is curious to note that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul had been promulgated amongst the Thracians at an early period by a religious teacher named Zalmoxis.[112] A further reference to the working of the human heart will indicate that wherever the belief in a future state has superseded the old crude idea of wandering ghosts, and become the unquestioned faith of the people, a latent desire exists in every wedded pair, who have truly lived and loved together, to accompany each other to the tomb; and this desire is stronger in the wife to whom, by common consent, a larger measure of delicacy and sentiment is awarded.[113]

In India this desire appears to have been brought into play during that phase of civilisation when sentiment begins to triumph over materialism; when the husband shuddered at the knowledge that after his death, his widow would be transferred to a kinsman,

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112. *Herodotus*, iv, 94, 95; v. 5.

113. A story has been preserved in the Arabian Nights in which a man, who has been thrown upon a distant island, and has married the daughter of the king, finds that it is the custom of the country for the husband to follow a deceased wife to the tomb, and accordingly expresses the greatest alarm at the discovery.

and the loving wife revolted at the idea of being made over to the same individual who might already have had a wife of his own. There were also exceptional circumstances which would lead to an extension of the rite of Sati. The precautions to be taken by a king against being poisoned or assassinated by a female were rendered unnecessary when the female was condemned to enter the fire after the death of her deceased master, and when the prolonged existence of a king was a point of paramount importance to every wife and concubine in his own family. Again, the unprotected state in which widows were left in a lawless age, and the harsh treatment they would receive as mere dependants in the family, must have driven many a distracted woman to enter the fire and follow the soul of a loving husband. In a still later age, when the rite of Sati became associated with the Brahmanical religion, and was glorified as an act which conferred lasting fame upon the wife and immortal happiness upon hereself and her deceased, it is not surprising that the rite should have become general throughout India. In that terrible hour which succeeds the death of a beloved husband, when the reason is crazed with grief, and the inner-apartment is filled with weeping and wailing, it is easy to understand that a widow would prefer a glorious death before a thousand spectators, and immediate re-union with a deceased husband, to a life of degradation in which every pleasure would be denied her, and her very presence would be regarded as an evil omen.

2. Heroic age of Hindu history identified with the Aryan conquest of Hindustan

Turning now from the patriarchal age, during which the Vedic Aryans were probably restricted to the neighbourhood of Meerut and Delhi, it becomes necessary to glance at the period during which they descended the valleys of the Ganges and the Jamuna and achieved the conquest of Hindustan. This era of Aryan conquest may be regarded as the heroic age of Hindu history, but it is almost a blank to the historical student. In Hebrew history, the corresponding period of conquest is depicted with a fullness and truthfulness which would alone suffice to perpetuate the story to the end of time. Indeed the books of Joshua and Judges comprise the only authentic annals of heroic times, when a patriarchal form of government was modified by the rise of individual warriors, who conquered new territories and ruled them with a strong arm, by the common consent of the people at large. In Greece, the heroic age is obscured by legends, which have yet to be subjected to a tedious critical process before they can be expected to yield historical results. But in India the case is even worse. The age of Aryan conquest may have been one of convulsion and upheaval. The valleys of the Ganges and the Jamuna may have rung with victories as memorable as those of Joshua, Barak, Gideon, Jephtha, and Samson. Old landmarks may have been destroyed, and a new religious faith superadded to the grosser superstitions of the aborigines. But scarcely a vestige or record of the conquest remains beyond what philologists may

elicit from a study and comparison of languages. Even the names of the men who fought the battles, and subjugated the country from the Himalayas to the Vindhya mountains, have passed away like the memory of the shepherd kings. There may have been old Kshatriya ballads which celebrated the establishment of Aryan empires at Delhi, Agra, Oudh, and Behar. If so, however, they have long been converted into nursery fictions, like the stories of the wars of Bhima against the Usuras, or the stories of the wars of the four younger Pandavas in connection with the Aswamedha of Yudhishthira. Perhaps they have also been transmuted into obscure myths or wars between the Devatas and the Diatyas, the gods and demons; which may possibly be identified with the conflict between the fair-complexioned Aryans and the black-skinned aborigines; although in their present form, they certainly seem to refer more frequently to the later antagonism between the Brahmans and the Buddhists. Here and there in the epics and the Puranas, glimpses may perhaps be obtained of kings who had conquered the surrounding kings, and had thereby attained a certain supremacy as local suzerains. In this manner, mention is made of Indra as a temporal sovereign; of Nahusha, Vena, Prithu, Manu, and others; and of a succession of lords paramount who were known as Indras. But these lists, as will be shown hereafter, are utterly untrustworthy. Some of the sovereigns are represented, in the inflated language of Oriental exaggerations, as conquerors of the earth, and rulers over all its continents and seas. Others are said to have conquered the three worlds, namely, earth, heaven, and the underworld. Meantime, the reigns of the several rulers

are extended over many thousands of years. It will, however, suffice to state here that, with the dubious exceptions noted, not a single relic has hitherto been recovered, which can be regarded as a veritable illustration of the old Aryan conquest of Hindustan.

Two inferences respecting the heroic period

Two inferences, however, may be drawn from existing data, which throw some light upon the heroic period, namely :

(i) That the Aryan conquest of Hindustan was mainly carried out whilst the Brahmans were employed as mere animal sacrificers, and before they had attained political power as a hierarchy.

(ii) That during the rise of Hindu suzerainties, the Brahmans may have occasionally struggled to assert their supremacy ; but in so doing, they met with considerable opposition from the ruling kings.

The rise of the Brahmans as an ecclesiastical hierarchy was certainly subsequent to the Aryan conquest. When Nishadha, Ayodhya, and Mithila were already in existence as independent empires, the Brahmans are merely introduced as messengers and sacrificers; and every attempt to represent them as holding important posts in the government is palpably mythical. The early kings were their own priests, and marriage rites were performed not by a Brahman but by the father of the bride. Indeed it would appear that the heroic age of Hindu history was eminently an age of sacrifice. During the patriarchal period, the assertion of proprietorship over cleared land was celebrated by a Rajasuya sacrifice; and the assertion of local suzerainty by an

Aswamedha, or sacrifice of a horse ; and it is easy to infer that the acquisition of large territories, and the establishment of substantive empires, would be accompanied by vast holocausts, at which cattle would be slain by hundreds and thousands, and the banquet would be truly national and imperial. It is probable that under such circumstances, the mystic sacrificial ritual laid down in the Aitareya Brahmanam was gradually moulded into formal shape; whilst the extensive employment of Brahmans at such sacrifices may have originated the caste idea, with which it was undoubtedly associated, that no food was so pure as that which was cooked by a Brahman.

Early antagonism of the Brahmans to the ruling kings

During the rise of Hindu suzerainties, the Brahmans seem to have been occasionally in antagonism to the ruling kings. In the myths of successive Indras and other lords paramount, to which reference has already been made, one single idea predominates throughout, which indicates either their Brahmanical origin or the extent to which they have been manipulated by the Brahmanical compilers. If a king treated the Brahmans with respect, and adhered strictly to Brahmanical law, his empire was described as prosperous, and his reign as glorious. If, on the conrary, a king was disrespectful to the Brahmans, and gratified his passions without regard to Brahmanical law, which appears to have been the case with King Vena, then, according to the myth, he was deprived of his kingdom; and condemned to exile or destruction. The same idea finds full expression in the Institutes of Manu, where certain kings are

specified as having been utterly ruined because they had not learned virtuous humility from the Brahmans; in other words, who had not shown the deference to an arrogant priesthood which was claimed by the Brahmanical hierarchy.

The worthless character of these myths, beyond perhaps indicating an early opposition between the Brahmans and the ruling kings, may be further proved by a reference to the myths respecting Indra. Here it should be remarked that the name of Indra is sometimes applied to a deity, sometimes to sovereignty, sometimes to a mortal hero, and possibly, on some occasions, it may be the eponym of the Aryan race. In the myths, however, he is recognised as a deity, but serious charges of impiety are brought against him. In a legend, already quoted, he is said to have seduced the wife of a pious sage;[114] and in the *Vishnu Purana,* he is represented as having treated with disrespect a flower which had been given to him by a sage named Durvasa; and on both occasions he was severely punished by the loss of power. At another time, having offended the Brahmans, a rival named Nahusha was permitted to conquer him, and to exercise his sovereignty. Indra is then said to have concealed himself in a lotus, while Nahusha required Indra's wife to accept him as her husband. The lady made no attempt to deny the right of Nahusha, under the old Kshatriya law by which the wife became the property of the conqueror of the husband; but she simply endeavoured to

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114. Described elsewhere.

put off Nahusha with excuses and promises. At length, Nahusha refused to grant her any further delay; and the lady agreed to yield to his wishes if he would fetch her away in a palanquin borne by Brahmans. Nahusha acquiesced; the palanquin was prepared with Brahman bearers; and the amorous conqueror set off to bring away his bride. But the bearers were slow, and Nahusha was in a hurry, and he accordingly abused the Brahmans and finally put out his foot and pushed one of them; on which the Brahman turned around and cursed that he would turn into a snake. The result was that Nahusha lost both the lady and the sovereignty; whilst Indra recovered both, on the implied understanding that he would be more respectful to the Brahmans in future. This myth is one of many which may be referred to either for the earlier wars between the Aryans and the Nagas, or for the later opposition between the Brahmans and the Buddhists.

Absence of theocracy in India

Possibly some further light might be thrown upon the heroic period of Hindu history, by reference to the same period in Hebrew history; and perhaps the wars carried on by the so-called Judges against the Canaanites and the surrounding tribes were of a similar character to those which were carried on by the unknown heroes of the age of the Aryan conquest against the aboriginal tribes in the valley of the Ganges and the Jamuna. But there the analogy ceases. Government in Hindustan never appears to have been a theocracy, such as prevailed under Eli the priest and Samuel the prophet; nor are there any traces of a king in the same manner

that Saul and David were successively selected and anointed by the prophet Samuel. Consequently, no analogy is furnished which will serve to clear away the deep obscurity which at present veils the rise and progress of the Aryan conquest in Hindustan.

3. Monarchical age of Hindu history

The third and last period in early Hindu history, namely, the monarchical age, may now be brought under consideration. Here, at the very outset, will be perceived the vast interval which separates the patriarchal period, which is depicted in the traditions of the war of *Mahabharata,* and the monarchical period which is depicted in those of the *Ramayana.* The primitive habits and simplicity of patriarchal households had passed entirely away; and beneath all the exaggerations of Oriental fancy, it is easy to perceive that wealth, civilisation and luxury were really to be found in the palaces and courts of kings. Polyandry had entirely disappeared, and nothing remained of it but the Swayamvara; and married life, when not depressed by polygamy, appears in its most pleasing form as the loving and devoted union of one woman to one man.

Distinction between the era of constitutional monarchy and that of despotism supported by the Brahmanical hierarchy

Before, however, entering upon the history of the monarchical period, a distinction must be drawn between the constitutional form of government, which finds expression in the Vedic traditions in the epics, and the system of despotism, checked only by an ecclesiastical hierarchy, which is laid down in the

Institutes of Manu. In the constitutional form of monarchy, the Hindu sovereigns appear to have reigned with a tolerably peaceful possession of their respective territories; and the interest in the traditions does not turn so much upon wars and blood feuds as upon incidents of a domestic character, and the evils produced by polygamy and gambling. Indeed, but for these evils, it is difficult to understand why the independence of Hindu sovereignties should not have been maintained down to the present generation. A glance, however, at the later period of Hindu depotism, during which a Brahmanical heirarchy exercised supreme power, will help to solve the whole problem.

Ecclesiastical hierarchies fatal to constitutional forms

The domination of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, in alliance with monarchy, invariably proves fatal to the liberties of a people and destructive to all constitutional forms. It seems to have swept away the popular element from the Aryan monarchies in Hindustan, in the same way that it has swept away the same element from the continental monarchies of Europe; and if England has been preserved from a similar fate, it is because during that half-century, which formed the most critical period of her history, the Episcopal hierarchy found itself, in the first instance, in antagonism to the people, and subsequently in antagonism to the crown. Had it proved otherwise, Great Britain might have been, in the present day, of no more account in Europe than Portugal or Spain; and might have even succumbed to the imperial yoke of a Louis or a Napoleon.

Illustrations of the early monarchical period furnished by the tradition of Rama

The first and most important tradition, which has been preserved of the early monarchical period, is that of Rama; but the narrative, as it appears in the *Ramayana,* has been so intensely Brahmanised throughout that its full significance cannot be apprehended until the age of Brahmanical revival has been brought under review. The main object kept in view throughout the *Ramayana* is to represent Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu, and a deified protector of the Brahmans against the Buddhists. But the moral aim of the old Kshatriya tradition was to point out the political evils which were caused by polygamy; and especially to show the mischief which would be occasioned by any attempt on the part of a sovereign to set aside the son of the first wife in order to give the succession to the son of a younger and favourite partner. This matter was apparently a favourite theme with the old Kshatriya bards; and no doubt the evils in question might have been exemplified, at one time or another, in the histories of most of the reigning families in India. It finds expression in the old legend of King Santanu and his son Bhishma; it appears in a still grosser and exaggerated form in later Puranic legends. In the case of Rama, it led to the exile of the rightful heir and the successions of a younger son; and with that event the original tradition appears to close. The subsequent life of Rama in the jungle, and his wars against the Rakshasas, appear to refer to a later phase in Hindu history and, accordingly, must be reserved for consideration hereafter in connection with the age of Buddhism and Brahmanical revival.

The main points, in what appears to be the original tradition of Rama, may be very briefly indicated. King Dasaratha was the sovereign of the great kingdom of Ayodhya, or Oudh. He had three wives and four sons. Rama was the son of the first and principal wife; and Bharata was the son of the youngest and favourite wife. The middle wife had two sons, who play subordinate parts in the story; one appearing as the friend of Rama, and the other as the friend of Bharata.

When Rama was young, he proceeded on a visit to the neighbouring king of Mithila where he married Sita, the daughter of the king; and his brothers were likewise married to royal maidens of the same family.

After the marriages, the question arose as to the appointment of an heir-apparent, or little king. This appointment is in accordance with an Oriental custom, which also existed under the Hebrew monarchy, of nominating the eldest son to the throne during the lifetime of the reigning sovereign, in order that the young prince might be trained in the duties of administration, and relieve his father from the cares of the state; and above all, that the question of succession might be fully settled during the lifetime of the king. Rama, the son of Kausalya, the first wife, seems to have had the best claim; but the beautiful Kaikeyi, the youngest and favourite wife of the sovereign, seems to have long determined that her son Bharata should be appointed heir-apparent. The sovereign himself, like many a sovereigns advancing in years, was not inclined to make the appointment; but the

chieftains and people probably found that he was getting old and uxorious, and they were anxious for the installation of a young prince, and a settlement of the question of succession. Accordingly, a deputation of ministers, chieftains, and people proceeded to the palace and prayed to the sovereign to appoint Rama. The sovereign, still hesitating, summoned a great council; and again the popular feeling seems to have been in favour of Rama. The sovereign now yielded, and announced to the council that Rama should be installed the next morning. He had, however, anticipated the result, and had already sent Bharata to the city of his maternal grandfather so that he could be out of the way; and in the evening he hinted to Rama that he had better be on a watch against Bharata, as Bharata might have had an inkling of the contemplated installation, and taken steps to prevent it by force of arms. The news that Rama was to be installed naturally ran through the city like wildfire, and of course reached the royal ladies. In the evening, the sovereign proceeded to the apartments of Kaikeyi, probably with the view of reconciling her to the disappointment; but he found her in a fit of sullen rage, and by the force of angry tears and youtful beauty she managed to wheedle him into promising that Rama should be sent to exile, and that Bharata should be installed the successor to the kingdom.

Meantime, and throughout the night, the city is said to have been in a fever of expectation. At early dawn, the rural population was pouring in to behold the ceremony of installation; whilst the citizens watered the streets, and decorated their houses with

flags and garlands; and singers, musicians, and dancing-girls began to perform before the joyous multitudes. At the same time, Rama and his wife Sita were wholly ignorant of the intrigue that had been transpiring in the royal apartments; and when Rama was summoned by the king, he proceeded in his chariot to the palace in the full expectation of being installed with the customary ceremonies. At that moment the blow fell. Instead of a throne, Rama learned from his weeping father and relentless mother-in-law that he was to be sent to exile. He broke the sad news to his own mother, and saw her dashing down from the height of felicity and triumph to the lowest depths of wretchedness and despair. Rebellion was suggested, but Rama dutifully set his face against disobedience to his father. Rama then proceeded to his own house and broke the sad news to his wife; but Sita at once declared her intention of braving all the dangers and privations of the jungle, and accompanying him in his exile. The hapless pair then walked barefoot to the palace, as a token of submission; and having taken leave of the king and queens, they were driven by the charioteer of the sovereign to the dominions of a Bhil king, who appears to have owed some allegiance to the kingdom of Ayodha.

On the night after the departure of Rama, the king is said to have died with grief at the loss of his son; but the fact of his death was not made known, as the women who were with him at the time swooned away in horror and sorrow. Accordingly, at early morning the palace life commenced as usual. The bards and eulogists sounded the praises of the king, and the men-servants

and maid-servants were busy with their respective duties. All were expecting the appearance of the sovereign, when suddenly a cry ran through the palace that he was dead, and the air was filled with weeping and wailing. But amidst all the commotion arising from the suddenness of the catastrophe, there was a strict attention to constitutional forms. The ministers assembled together, and decided that the remains of the deceased king should not be burned in the absence of all his sons, but should be preserved in a bath of oil. Next a great council was convened, and the question of the succession was debated; and it was determined that the decision of the king in favour of Bharata should be considered as binding and final. The exile of Rama was accepted as a disqualification; and swift messengers were despatched to bring Bharata to Ayodhya. On the arrival of Bharata, the funeral rites of the king were celebrated without a Sati, but with a pomp and circumstance which forms a striking picture of the times. The bards and eulogists appeared in front, chanting the praises of the deceased sovereign. Next followed the widows and other women of the king, with their long black hair dishevelled over their faces, piercing every ear with their shrieks and screams. Next the royal corpse was carried in state upon a litter covered with flowers and garlands, whilst the ensigns of royalty surrounded it. The rest of the procession was composed of chariots filled with the royal servants, who scattered gifts amongst the people. In this manner the procession moved out of the city towards a lonely place on the bank of the river where the funeral pile was erected; and the royal

corpse was laid upon the pile, and speedily enveloped and consumed in a tower of flames. Here the tradition seems to end, so far as it refers to Vedic times. How Sita was subsequently carried away by the king of the Rakshasas, and was recovered after some severe fighting, but separated from her husband and abandoned in the jungle on the bare suspicion of her purity, are incidents which may have had some foundation in truth, but which scarcely seem to call for notice in a sketch of the Vedic period. So too the alleged return of Rama to Ayodhya, and his subsequent reign as king, form a very interesting climax to the story, but are otherwise associated with traditions which seem to belong to a later age.

The main features of the incidents connected with the exile may now be considered in the light of the three influences already specified. In the first instance, it may be remarked that throughout the story, flesh-meat appears as the ordinary diet; although, as already seen; such food is scarcely tolerated in the code of Manu, and was declared by later commentators to be improper and impure in the present Yuga. Rama and his wife and brother appear to have lived chiefly on venison, and to have dried the meat in the sun after the manner of the American Indians. In connection with this subject, a question might be raised as to the superior physique of flesh-eaters over vegetarians, and as to whether the change of diet, which was begining to take place in the time of Manu, ultimately led to the subjugation.

Pictures of married life: polygamy contrasted with monogamy

The pictures of married life in the same story present a remarkable contrast between the intrigues which prevailed in a polygamous household, and the domestic felicity which was to be found even in the jungle, when the hero was married only to one wife. Indeed the pictures of life of women in the inner-apartment furnish powerful illustrations of the working of the human heart, under circumstances which are altogether foreign, to European experiences. It will be seen that in the seclusion of the inner-apartment, set aside for women, the passions of jealousy and ambition will convert the woman into a tigress, as in the case of Kaikeyi; and will impel a woman to suggest a rebellion against her husband, which might culminate in his assassination, as in the case of Kausalya. As to the uxorious old king, who was induced by a young wife to commit an act of injustice, which might have imperilled the well-being of the realm, abundant instances of a similar nature might be found in almost every family history. It is in fact the story of everyday life, the same in India as elsewhere, aggravated only by the conditions of polygamy. The domestic felicity of Rama and Sita is by no means perfect, but it is infinitely more pleasing than that which prevailed in the palace of King Dasaratha. Up to the period of exile, and for some time after it, Sita appears as the true ideal of a wife, animated by a loving and self-sacrificing devotion towards her husband; excepting of course in those portions of the *Ramayana* which have been extracted from the modern version, in which the character more resembles

the Hindu princess of the present day. The subsequent story of the exile is altogether dubious, and Sita displays a wayward disposition, which is wholly at variance with what might have been expected from her previous behaviour. One peculiarity in the wedded life of Rama and Sita is worthy of notice, namely, the absence of all mention of children; for it was not until after the triumphant return to Ayodha, and the abandonment of Sita in the jungle, that she appears in the character of a mother. This circumstance may have had something to do with the sequel of the story, in which the conduct of Rama appears to have been harsh in the extreme, and is usually regarded with disapproval even by Indian commentators who believe in his divinity. The fact that Sita was childless until after her deliverance from Ravana, and the subsequent discovery that she was about to become a mother, may have suggested to the mind of Rama that he was not the father of the coming progeny, and induced him to abandon his wife under the cruel circumstances mentioned in the *Ramayana*.

Democratic element manifested in the popular councils

The democratic element in the kingdom of Ayodhya appears to have been much stronger than could have been anticipated under an Oriental despotism. It involved not only the existence of councils of ministers and chieftains, but also assemblies of people; and it would appear that even such questions as the appointment of an heir-apparent, and the nomination of a successor in case of the sudden demise of a king, were brought

under the consideration of the whole body of citizens; although efforts have certainly been made by the Brahmanical compilers to represent Vasishtha the Brahman as the superior power who directed all and counselled all.

Religious ideas in the tradition

The religious ideas which find expression in the original tradition are altogether of the old Kshatriya type. Flesh-meat is not only offered to the Vedic gods, but meat and wine are promised by Sita to the river goddesses, provided only that Rama returns in safety to the city of his fathers. The old Vedic idea of gratifying the gods with good things, in return for favours received or expected, is thus fully expressed; and vows of gifts to Ganga and Jamuna are made much after the fashion in which vows are said to be made to the Virgin and Saints in many Roman Catholic countries.

Further illustrations of the monarchical period furnished by the story of Nala and Damayanti

A second tradition, namely that of Nala and Damayanti, furnishes a far more pleasing picture of the constitutional phase of early Hindu monarchy than is displayed in the tradition of Rama. The story seems to have originated in an age not very remote from that of Rama, but it is devoid of all references to polygamy, and seems to point to the evils which are likely to arise from an undue indulgence in gambling. It is evidently much later than the patriarchal story of the war of *Mahabharata*, for whilst the existence of such a kingdom as Nishadha implies an

advanced stage in Aryan conquest, the tradition is free from all allusions to polyandry, or to any of the lawless forms of marriage which appear to have accompanied the earlier conquests of the Kshatriyas. Moreover, the gambling match of Nala presents a more civilised picture than the gambling match of Yudhishthira, for the losing gambler altogether refuses to stake his wife upon a throw. At the same time the tradition is evidently Vedic. The institution, known as the Swayamvara, finds full expression in its happiest form; and the marriage rites of Nala and Damayanti are performed by the father of the bride. Moreover, the tradition is prior to the rise of Brahmanism; for the proposition of a second Swayamvara, in the case of Damayanti, implies the case of remarriage of a widow, which is altogether opposed to Brahmanical law.

The play of instincts in this charming story is more delicate and refined than in the traditions of a patriarchal type. The expression of mutual affection is exquisitely true to human nature in a higher development. So true is the picture of the agony of the wife and mother during the progress of the gambling match; and her subsequent devotion to her husband, even after he had deserted her ; and her love for the children subordinate to the love for her husband; and the final re-union of the pair after so many trials and sorrows. Above all, the passion for revenge is beautifully modified by a higher tone of moral sentiment than is displayed in the patriarchal story of the *Mahabharata*. In the sequel, Nala not only forgives his enemy, but dismisses him with many gifts.

Manifestations of the democratic element

The democratic element in the tradition is of a peculiar type. Whilst the chieftains and the people display great anxiety during the gambling match, lest the king should lose his kingdom, the queen freely consults with them as to the best means of avoiding the threatening catastrophe. Meantime, no authentic traces are to be found of any interference on the part of a Brahmanical hierarchy; nor is the authority of religion brought into play for the purpose of restraining the king in his carrer of ruin.

Religious ideas

The religious ideas in the story are all Vedic, but apparently of a comparatively late period. The personification of the gods of the elements is complete; and they appear in the heaven of Indra in much the same fashion as the Olympic deities appear in the Homeric poems. Moreover, the Vedic deities, like the Olympic deities, are amenable to moral passions; and appear at the Swayamvara as candidates for the hand of the beautiful Damayanti. The signs by which the blushing damsel knew that her admirers were divinities, and not mortal men, are very poetically expressed; their feet would not touch the earth, their eyes winked not, their garlands were as fresh as if newly gathered, and not a stain of dust lay upon their raiment, nor a drop of perspiration upon their brows. Damayanti, however, whilst paying all homage to the gods, would choose only Nala for her lord; whilst Nala, in return, publicly declared that he would be ever faithful to the maiden with the eye serene, since she had chosen him to be her husband in the presence of the gods.

Stages in Hindu history prior to the spiritual domination of the Brahmans

Such then, step by step, the current of Indian history appears to have run from the earliest glimmer of patriarchal legend down to the monarchical age when the Brahmanical system, which is defined and explained in the code of Manu, began to exercise a dominant sway over the people of Hindustan. The earlier process by which the Vedic religion was gradually set aside by Brahmanical law must, for the present, be left to conjecture. In all probability, the Brahmans rose from the condition of mere mercenary sacrificers to that of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, by the ordinary means which facilitates the rise of a priesthood to political power. In the first instance, the Brahmans appeared in their sacerdotal character as a medium between the worshippers and the deity worshipped; and in that capacity they probably first pretended to explain such religious omens as might be gathered from the manifestations and motions of the sacrificial flame, or from the marks which appeared on the animal that was sacrificed. In connection with this pretended knowledge of the will of the deities, the Brahmans seem to have practised astrology, and to have assumed the possession of supernatural powers, such as the production of rain or drought, health or disease, prosperity or calamity. Finally, they asserted for themselves a divine origin from Brahma, whom they exalted very far above all the Vedic deities. Consequently, they arrogated for themselves a superiority over the popular gods, under which they promulgated new religious

dogmas, and introduced a multiplicity of rites of purification and consecration. Subsequently, at every birth, marriage, or death, there was the inevitable Brahman, who thus became associated, in the minds of the people, with every household event that gladdened their hearts or moved them to tears. Moreover, the prayers and incantations of the Brahmans were supposed to be always necessary to insure the long life and prosperity of all individuals and families; to procure a favourable seed time and an abundant harvest; to increase the profits of every bargain and promote the success of every undertaking; to purify the water of wells and strengthen the foundation of dwelling-houses; to consecrate and impart new powers to weapons, armour, ensigns, implements, books, and tools, and to ward off every danger and every calamity which can befall a human being and his belongings. In this manner every Hindu has moved for centuries in the fetters of religious superstition, from cradle to grave; and the result has been that the national life has ebbed away.

Evil results of Brahmanical ascendancy

The evils which have resulted from the establishment of a Brahmanical hierarchy have indeed far exceeded those which have followed the establishment of any other ecclesiastical ascedancy. Other priesthoods, like the Jesuits in Spain, have dominated over the minds of men, and crushed out the national aspirations and deadened the intellectual energies; but then such priests have generally sprung from the people, and have occasionally appeared

as the protectors of the oppressed, and have stayed the hand of the tyrant and marauder by the threat of anathemas and excommunications. The Brahmans, however, whilst occasionally exercising similar powers for the furtherance of their own ends, have themselves been the victims of a caste system which has necessarily shut them out from all sympathies with the masses. In other words, they formed a hereditary caste of priests, which had laboured to degrade the Sudra instead of supporting him, and fattened upon the credulity of a people whom they had neither the power nor the will to serve.

Benefical influences exercised by the Brahmans; spiritual teaching

It must, however, not be inferred that the rise of the Brahmanical hierarchy was productive only of evil. There were Brahmans who passed their lives in divine contemplation, and analysed the thoughts, the language, the intellect, and the affections until they obtained from the depths of their consciousness a deeper knowledge of divine things, and a more enlightened appreciation of the attributes of the supreme spirit. It was such sages who succeeded in weaning away the minds of many from the grosser superstitions of polytheism to the higher faith in one God; and who taught after their own mystic fashion how man might obtain the absorption of his soul into the divine essence, or dwell hereafter as a purified spirit with the Supreme Soul. It may be that the aspirations for monotheism, which find

expression in the institutes of Manu, are couched in the pantheistic language of the Vedantists ; but even amidst the aberrations of religious thought, the throes of the soul to escape from the trammels of polytheism, are to be found flashes of that eternal truth which is as old as the stars, and finds a response in every human bosom. 'All gods', says Manu, 'are in the Divine Spirit; all worlds are in the Divine Spirit; and the Divine Spirit produces the connected series of acts which are performed by embodied souls. Him some adore as present in the element of fire; others as present in Manu, lord of creatures; some as present in Indra; others as present in pure Ether; and others as the most High Eternal Spirit. It is he, who, pervading all beings in five elementary forms, causes them by the gradations of birth, growth, and dissolution, to revolve in this world like the wheels of a car. Thus the man, who perceives in his own soul the Supreme Soul present in all creatures, regards them all with equal benevolence, and will be absorbed at last in the highest Essence, even that of the Almighty himself.'[115] It was left for one greater than the Hindu legislator to teach the simpler and purer doctrine; 'God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.'[116]

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115. Manu, xii, 119, 123-126.

116. St. John, iv, 24.

Political condition of Hindustan in the Brahmanic age

Here it may again be remarked that at the time when the code of Manu was compiled, the area of Aryan conquest had spread far beyond the limits of Brahmanism, and probably included both Buddhism and Brahmanism within its frontiers. The Brahmans, as a body, had not advanced beyond Kanouj on the banks of the Ganges; whilst the Aryans had conquered the whole of Hindustan from sea to sea. Again the Aryans are directed to select their Brahmanical preceptors from Brahmarshi-desa, or the country of the Brahman Rishis; whilst bitter denunciations are pronounced against atheists and heretics, in other words, against the followers of Buddha. From these data, it is easy to infer that whilst the Brahman missionaries were spreading from Brahmarshi-desa, on the west of Kanouj, Buddhism was really dominant in eastern Hindustan. At the same time, it is difficult to say how far the ideas of the Buddhists passed into Brahmanism; or how far the ideas of the Brahmans passed into Buddhism. Originally, the two currents of religious thought may have flowed on side by side, without exciting much antagonism. Subsequently, however, the practical atheism of the Buddhists in denying or ridiculing the gods of the Brahmans, and the opposition of the Brahmans towards the conventual system of the Buddhists, brought about those deadly hostilities which eventuated in the expulsion of the Buddhists, and triumph of the Brahmans. Meantime, the Swayamvara, the Rajusuya, and the Aswamedha passed away. The rites of marriage were brought into conformity with the

Brahmanical law. The use of flesh-meat at meals and sacrifices began to disappear, and vegetable food was substituted. Finally, the great Aryan empires, which had long been established in Hindustan, began to be swayed to and from by those religious convulsions which belong to the subsequent eras of Hindu history. Indeed the inquiries which have yet to be carried out in the religious history of India will be found to be the most important of all. The origin of polytheism amongst the Aryan people, and its development into monotheism, or the worship of the supreme spirit, have been in some measure indicated; but before the European reader can comprehend the Hindu people as they think and act, it will be necessary to review the rise and decline of that form of atheism in association with asceticism, which is known as Buddhism; to point out the method by which the Brahmanical compilers of the epics spiritualised Kshatriya heroes, such as Rama and Krishna, into incarnations of Vishnu as the Supreme Being; to investigate that deification of the passions, which was superadded to the fetish worship of the aboriginal races in primitive times; to unfold the process by which the new and strange gods were admitted to the Brahmanical pantheon; and to explore those forms of religious thought and philosophical inquiry which were promulgated by teachers and sages, whilst a dense cloud of superstition and ignorance overspread the land. Morever, there seems reason to hope that such inquiries will not only lead to a better knowledge of the progress of religious thought amongst the Hindus, but will help to solve the vexed

problem of why Christianity has failed to achieve that conquest over the national faith which it has effected elsewhere. Hitherto the non-acceptation of the Christian religion by the people of India has been referred to inscrutable causes, such as the mysterious dispensation of Providence, or the exceptional depravity of the the Hindu heart. But it will appear hereafter that it should be rather ascribed to the current of religious ideas, which has flowed in channels unknown and unappreciated by the western world, and which has rendered Christianity less acceptable to the civilised Hindus of the plains than to the barbarous aborigines who inhabit the hills.

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J. Talboys Wheeler was Assistant Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, and Secretary of the Indian Record Commission. With these official posts he combined an amateur, yet profound, interest in history, and published, among other volumes, the well-known *The Geography of Herodotus*.

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